



Girma Eshetu

**Keffa Zone, Bitu
Genet District,
Ethiopia**

Partner since: 2016

Traceable to: Single Estate

Altitude: 1950 - 2120 MASL

Varietals: Heirlooms 74110 and 74112

Processing: "Cherry collected from across 2 zones (East and West) on estate then further separated into 3-4 lots per zone based on harvest collection time. Coffee is pulped then soaked underwater overnight before transfer to shade net drying for two days to remove surface moisture. Final drying of 10-14 more days is carried out on a wide field of raised drying beds. Dry parchment is stored on the farm in a small warehouse then transferred down the mountain by small truck or horse (when the road is bad) to a larger warehouse in Keffa town. Final milling before export is done in Addis Ababa."

Harvest: October November December

Booking: March April May

Arrivals: May June July



In 2013, when we began working in Ethiopia we quickly decided to focus our work in Ethiopia's west, namely, the Jimma and Keffa zones. You can find Girma in Keffa, about a 4 hour drive from Jimma, followed by a few hours on horseback. The farm covers 200+ Organic and Utz certified hectares in Bita Genet District, high in the hills above a small village – Amecha Mechata, and is planted with Jimma research varieties 74110 and 74112. In February of 2016, we coordinated Girma's first ever export and we picked up 150 bags of Washed and 140 bags of Natural coffee. By April, we were booking the rest of his harvest (120 bags of washed coffees), and have bought his every bean ever since. Subsequent harvests have gone on to win Good Food Awards, drawing Girma to the center of Keffa's emerging specialty scene.

Girma's personal history is way more interesting than his coffee. Girma was the first of his family to graduate from college and he put his engineering degree to work at the St. George Brewery – an institution for Ethiopian beer drinkers. Over a 30 year career, Girma rose to management, and pursued his advanced degree. Moonlighting, Mr. Girma began to manufacture equipment – and his first success as a small mechanical coffee pulper – stamped G.E.M – Girma Eshetu Manufacturings. As his manufacturing business grew so did his knowledge of coffee. On one trip to Ethiopia's west (where metals are mined), Girma discovered that his father's side of the family was from the area – the area being Keffa Zone, near Bonga.

Turns out that, in some cases, the government of Ethiopia awards land to those who pass away in service to the state. This is what happened when Girma's father passed away, after which Girma's mother moved him to the new land far away in the South. She never spoke of where they were from, increasing Girma's surprise and desire to reconnect with his roots upon discovering distant family.



Ethiopia is a coffee powerhouse. It's the birthplace of the plant, the seventh largest producing country in world, and one of the world's leading consumers of coffee as well. Because coffee is such a vital part of the economy in Ethiopia, the government has a hand in it, making for an interesting coffee context. Ethiopia is proudly a nation that has never been colonized, and the longtime government has been from a tribal minority (the Tigray). In 2018 there was a coup that installed an Oromo president – the largest tribe in Ethiopia. Its namesake region, Oromia, sprawls awkwardly south and west from the capital city Addis Ababa – and covers the majority of coffee territory in Ethiopia.

Of the over 100 million people in Ethiopia, almost 15 million rely on coffee for income. Coffee accounts for 60% of foreign income, and is about 40% of total country exports. For the scope (Africa's largest producing country) and importance of the industry, there's a surprising amount of consolidation. Things are constantly changing in Ethiopia but for the most part, buying happens in three ways, from an Exporter who buys off the ECX, from a Coop Union which markets coffees collected from member coops, or direct from a single producer or estate (as long as they have a farm over 2 hectares, they can export). You can see more about these below.

ECX: The Ethiopian Commodity Exchange was established in 2008, with good intentions. The idea was to make market prices / price discovery available to rural sellers. The ECX installed tickers at 32 rural sites and also push notifications to a quarter million subscribers. The idea was, that this would protect farmers from predatory buyers. The ECX established 55 physical warehouses, where coffee is held across the country. Farmers bring parchment to the warehouse where it is graded by cuppers and given a designation. Contracts are sold to buyers that have seats on the auction. Contracts are all for 30 bag quantities, and buyers do NOT get to cup the lots before purchasing. When the ECX first opened, the mandate was that coffee had to go through the ECX. Quickly, warehouses overflowed, prices plummeted. There was also an outcry from specialty coffee buyers who wanted to work directly, or taste coffees before contracting. Certainly, it was a difficult launch. There's a good "Market Watch" piece on it called, The Market Maker. Those regulations were soon relaxed, allowing for some direct trading to continue with individual farms. However, the regulations still maintained that buyers and sellers be de-coupled. Previously, exporters often owned wetmills in Ethiopia and

could buy cherry and sell green. Now, wetmills are required to sell to the EXC, and exporters are required to buy from the ECX. In other words, wetmills cannot not directly sell to exporters. As it stands now, the only way to get exceptional coffee from the ECX is to buy it, then cup it see if you like it. If you don't, you're stuck. This process isn't practical for a specialty buyer, so oftentimes exporters will allow specialty buyers to cup through their purchases from the ECX and select the ones they like – the exporter can then use the coffees not selected to fill a commodity contract for another buyer. While this can result in good coffee, the traceability is lost and the ability to replicate that coffee next year is only as good as the cupper and relationship with your exporter.

COOP UNIONS: When we first arrived to Ethiopia in 2013, there were only 5 operating Unions organized by geography (Oromia, Sidama, Yirgacheffe, Limmu and Bench Maji). Oromia (extending as it does) is the largest, with 405 member coops, followed by Sidama Union, tiny in comparison with just over 50 coops represented. Yirg Union is smaller still. Coop Unions have a standard model in Ethiopia: buy coffee at the auction price, sell coffee to a buyer and collect 20% of the profit as service fees. From, there they split the remaining profit 70/30 with the coops they bought from. Unions are generally known in Ethiopia as FTO suppliers. Coffee that move through the ECX do not carry certifications, so the only place that you can get certified options are Unions and private farms. Recently, a new Coop Union was established called Kata Maduga. It brought together coops in Jimma that were formed by Technoserve work, and previously managed by the Oromia Union. These coops felt that their qualities were exceptional and that they could better represent themselves. It is now in its 3rd harvest, is a healthy Union and growing. We're big fans.

PRIVATE FARMS: Private farms are self-explanatory in many ways. Since 2008 and the establishment of the ECX, private farms have been the one option that preserve relationships and traceable coffee. The issue has been that Ethiopia is so populous, that farms large enough to fill a container, or produce an export size volume of coffee are rare. Where they do happen is most commonly seen in the west (Jimma and Keffa Zones) where land redistribution has formed larger coffee blocks.

Similarly, you may also find a landowner that builds a mill on their land, and buys cherry from surrounding farmers. This is called an out-grower scheme. They can directly export these coffees, and this has been a major loophole for wetmill owners who were affected by the ECX regulation. For examples, if I had a wetmill only, I have to sell to the ECX. But If I have a wetmill and I buy the farm it's on and register that farm for direct export – now I can sell all the coffee from my mill to direct buyer and bypass the ECX. While this does happen, the only ones that can do it have both money and political clout, stacking the deck a bit against the smallholder.