



Karinga Coffee Factory

Kiambu County, Kenya

Partner since: 2018

Traceable to: 650 Members of Karinga Coffee Factory

Altitude: 1840 MASL

Varietals: SL 34, SL 28 (90%), Batian, Ruiru 11

Processing: Cherries are wet milled and soaked overnight using water from the River Rwabura before being put to drying beds where the coffee is spread and hand-picked.

Harvest: October November December

Booking: March April May

Arrivals: May June July

Community Context

Karinga Factory was established in 1983 and rests on a 5acre piece of land serving Kimaruri, Kariungu, Gachuha and Mugalwa Villages. It is currently an island of top-notch smallholder (~1 ha plots) coffee production in a sea of tea-growing estates. Karinga's 650 members (~ 500 of which are active paying members) is affiliated with Gitwe Farmers Co-operative Society Ltd. The area is marked by rich red volcanic soils with excellent rainfall and drainage.

Country Context

Kenya is an enigma. It occupies a top spot in specialty – Kenyan top lots are always amongst the most expensive of any harvest. But yet it's a country where coffee production is dropping year over year. Kenya is a place where traceability is given, but knowing what you want and how to get it are two different things. Rarely do we find partners more capable, and loyalties more difficult to navigate than we do in Kenya. For all the aforementioned reasons, competition in Kenya is fierce, making prized coffees feel like even more of a success.

However, no matter how formally the industry is structured, coffee still remains a system of people.

And in a country where farmers own their own cherry production, there is additional power to connecting with coffee's most important stakeholder. Farmers can, for example, point you to the best collections from every harvest, or delay sending their lots to auction to give you another week to sample. At request they can change the way they separate lots, bringing new products to market in a year that would take other countries nearly a decade to do.

But experimentation is not the name of the game. With washed coffees working so well, you won't find many a manager willing to mess around with different fermentations, flotation, drying times or with certifications like organic.

The experiment instead is that of business model. How do cooperatives normalize earnings to keep their members engaged in coffee? How do we take away red tape to encourage more farmers to plant more coffee, as opposed to corn or dairy? How can small estates split off and succeed under their own pulping license? Is it better to sell through auction or directly to an international buyer – can you afford to cut out your marketing agent? Once you speak to these problems you are speaking the language of coffee in Kenya – this is a country that already knows how to coffee.