



Kibugu FCS, Gicherori Factory

Embu County, Kenya

Partner since: 2021

Traceable to: 1200 Members

Altitude: 1650 MASL

Varietals: SL 28, SL 34

Processing: Central

Processing: cherries are pulped, fermented overnight, then washed through raised channels to float and separate before being soaked and spread out on raised drying beds for 7 - 15 days.

Harvest: October November December

Booking: March April May

Arrivals: May June July

Embu County is lifted by Mt. Kenya, and a veritable Garden of Eden for coffee. It's densely populated, but one of the places where small coffee plots continue to thrive despite all of their new neighbors. It's a place that's run through with rivers and waterfalls; clean water is a matter of pride for those who live in Gicherori, so it's no surprise to see top-notch water management at the coffee factory in Gicherori, which is part of the larger Kibugu Cooperative. The short-rain season runs through the end of December in this area, coinciding with peak harvest and making drying difficult. Luckily Gikirima is at such altitude that sufficient harvest comes in Jan – March, so we have the ability to select from later collections with ideal drying conditions.

The Kibugu Farmers Co-operative Society brings Gicherori farmers together with neighbors in Gikirima, Ndunduri and Ngerwe. Average members have 1 hectare of land for coffee, and also grow eta, macadamia nuts, bananas and corn. The group has a field committee charged with mobilizing quality. On designated field days farmers will receive on-site training customized to their farm. Between this, and an advance payment program, they encourage farmers to stay active in the group and in their fields between each harvest.

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.