



Mwiboini Estate

Kirinyaga, Kenya

Partner since: 2021

Traceable to: Single Estate

Altitude: 1760

Varietals:

Processing: Coffee processing is all done by hand and in-house, overseen by owner/manager Mr. Gichangi. Cherries are pulped then immediately floated into fermentation tanks for 12-18 hours before additional washing and being put out for a day of skin drying with handpicking, followed by 7-12 days of drying on raised beds. Coffee is rested in parchment for a 4-6 weeks before milling.

Harvest: October November December

Booking: March April May

Arrivals: May June July



Community Context

On the slopes of Mt. Kenya, near the town of Kanjuu, and in the heart of Kirinyaga County – we find Mwiboini Estate. And the heart of Mwiboini Estate is in its owner, manager, and more – Michael Gichangi.

Mr. Gichangi grew up on a coffee farm, got a government job, then retired back to coffee by founding Mwiboini Estate. The goal was to focus solely on quality, to only hire from the community, and to only sell through direct export channels. Along the way Gichangi brought on agronomists, took Q classes, and started networking with roasters in Europe, Australia and across Asia. He's built, expanded and improved upon his pulper and drying beds, directly overseeing daily processing so as to put into practice his ongoing education. An education in quality inevitably includes drinking your own coffee, and towards that end Gichangi has started a local roasted brand to spread the love within his community.



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.