



## Thirikwa FCS – Gakuyu'ini Wet Mill

**Kirinyaga County,  
Kenya**

**Partner since:** 2019

**Traceable to:** 1600 Members

**Altitude:** 1700 MASL

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

**Processing:** Cherries are  
handpicked, pulped, then  
soaked for 12-48 hours using  
clean, recirculated water from  
the neighboring Kiri River.  
Coffee is then washed again  
through inclined grading  
channels before being moved to  
drying beds for 7-14 days.

**Harvest:** October November December

**Booking:** March April May

**Arrivals:** May June July



## Community Context

The deep, red volcanic soils in Kirinyaga are fed from the snow-melt waters of Mt Kenya. Add SL-28 and SL-34 varietals, bi-annual rainfall averaging 1500 mm / year, and generations of tradition in best practices, and the result is coffee with ambition. Rich conditions have also led to a diffusion of small, efficient farms; nearly 1600 members of Thrikwa FCS deliver to Gakuyu'ini wet mill, for example. Each member operates small farm plots of roughly 250 trees, allowing for elevated attention to best farming practices. With Gakau'ini being the only wet mill of this cooperative, cherry selection is extremely stringent- only the most perfect red ripe cherry is accepted, and you can certainly taste this in the cup. The coop has a strong board of directors who have been elected democratically. Collectively, the cooperative encourages involvement from female members. In this case over 50% of registered members are female – not so common in Kenya.



## 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.