



## Gatatha Farmers Company – Yara

## Kiambu County, Kenya

**Partner since:** 2016

**Traceable to:** Yara Estate

**Altitude:** 1450 - 1600 MASL

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

**Processing:** Cherries are harvested by block, pulped and washed through channels to float and separate, then soaked overnight before skin drying through mechanical dryers at low temp. Then placed on raised beds for over 10 days.

**Harvest:** October November December

**Booking:** March April May

**Arrivals:** May June July

## Community Context

Yara Estate was founded in 1902 as a British dairy estate; coffee came later, in 1930. Gatatha Farmers Company was then founded in 1971 to buy-out the estate and turn it into a cooperative. Lower elevations are dedicated to cow feed, fish ponds and tea while higher hills are for coffee. As of 2018 the 640 hectare farm was 1/3rd organic, with plans to go fully organic by 2020. Rich red loam soil is well drained and assisted by additional drainage pits. Deep roots are encouraged through aggressive pruning, and in some areas, by grafting SL-34 varietals on Ruiru II stock root.

Gatatha Farmers Company universe functions in and upon itself, located four hours north of Nairobi in the tea-filled highlands of Kiambu County. They work in tea themselves. And fish. And in feeder corn for cows, and in the milk that they produce. And real estate. And more. But all of this is funded by coffee.

Gatatha's two brands – Yara Estate and Windrush Farms, pay big dividends for members, but only once per year. Whereas most large Kenyan cooperatives have failed over the years, in part because of pressure from members for more regular income, Gatatha has thrived by using coffee profits to fund a portfolio of investments which, in turn, provide monthly dividends to members. From these

profits, enough is left over to support local police, schools, roads and water projects.

Sometimes it's boring work behind the bean that makes a coffee special. Coffees that come from these farms are top-notch, and offer testament to this. Our work with them is to provide that extra incentive they need to take the next step with lot separation and flotation. Because, when you are working with the best, the only thing you can do is keep getting better.

## 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.