



Kiriga Estate

Kiambu County, Kenya

Partner since: 2019

Traceable to: Single Estate:
owned by Dr. Brian Gakunga

Altitude: 1425 MASL

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

Processing: Cherries are
floated, pulped, washed using
clean recirculated river water,
then hand-picked before 12-24
hours of dry fermentation and
drying on raised beds.

Harvest: October November December

Booking: March April May

Arrivals: May June July

Community Context

Dr. Brian Gakunga is a medical doctor, but his PhD might as well be in coffee. His father, and his father's father, have been in the coffee business since buying their farm from a British Colonist, back before that was a practice that happened with frequency. The farm is only a few kilometers from Thika town, right off Gatanga road for those familiar. Completely devoted to coffee, the estate has 80,000 trees divided evenly across 8 blocks. Each block borders and draws water from the Chania river – the boundary between Kiambu and Murang'a counties, and an important resource for the community. Because of this the Gakunga family has made visible efforts to be good stewards – including seepage pits, reclamation stations and a private dam which holds water in the dry season, and is at times visited by hippos.

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.