



Growing profitable wild coffee

2014-2017 | Oromia region, Ethiopia

Ethiopia is known as the birthplace of coffee and is renowned for its lucrative Arabica coffee beans.

Half of Ethiopia's annual coffee production comes from wild coffee growing in Afromontane rainforests. Although this coffee is an organic, high-value product, most forest communities have not been able to benefit much from producing and selling it.

Most people living in the project's target areas in Oromia are subsistence farmers, who harvest wild coffee on a periodic basis to increase their household income. Lack of training in business and marketing skills and in effective coffee production practices, as well as a lack of access to capital, means that currently farmers are unable to access national and international coffee markets and are forced to sell their coffee to local traders at a low price.

To fetch higher prices wild coffee needs to be licensed to certify it meets quality standards. As local farmers' produce does not reach these quality standards, farmers sell their coffee beans for a much lower price than they could fetch if their production and preservation was developed to a higher standard. Farm Africa is helping coffee farmers to increase production volumes, standards and quality assurance so they can command higher prices.

PROJECT OVERVIEW:



In Ethiopia, the coffee industry provides employment for nearly 15 million people and makes up some 28% of the country's yearly exports.

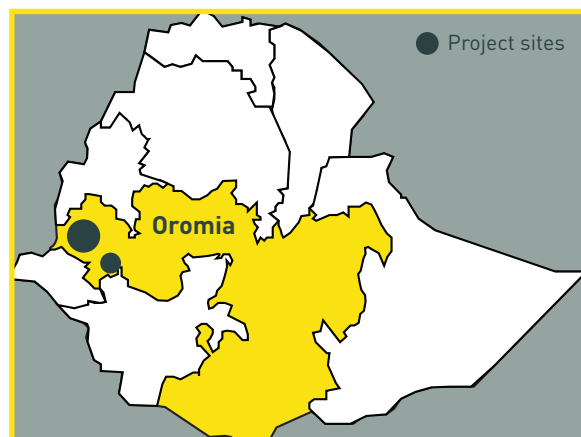
Farm Africa's project will enable forest communities to better participate in the wild coffee value chain. It will directly benefit 10,000 coffee farmers in Ethiopia.

Particular focus will be on the empowerment of women, who have traditionally lacked access to business skills training, to effectively participate in the wild coffee value chain.

Zeritheun standing by her wild coffee trees.
Photo: Farm Africa / Stephanie Schafrath

"We know the forest is our life, what happens to it affects our lives. Its protection is key to being able to make the most of forest resources like wild coffee. Coffee is our only source of income. We have never had good awareness about growing wild coffee and post-harvest handling. Now we focus on maintaining quality. Hopefully this quality will lead us to better markets and will change the way we live in the future."

- Zeritheun, 25 years old



The project is being delivered in the Illubabor and Keleme Wallaga zones located in the south-western part of Oromia regional state, Ethiopia.

"My hope is to change my life. We've faced great challenges, as we were compelled to sell our coffee at a low price to local traders. This makes our life difficult, but this project means this could change."

- Mengiste, 67 years old



Farm Africa helps wild coffee producers to sustainably boost their income by improving coffee quality, productivity, business practices and market integration.



IMPROVING PRODUCTION, HANDLING AND TRANSPORT:

Farm Africa drives up the quality of coffee by introducing new methods of harvesting, handling and transportation. To access the best markets, coffee beans must be harvested to a certain standard. Training shows farmers how to assure quality by only picking ripe coffee and improving its washing, drying, packing, storing and transportation. Coffee is hygroscopic, meaning it has the ability to attract and hold water molecules from the surrounding environment, which can drastically change its taste. Keeping the coffee beans clean and dry throughout all production stages is therefore particularly important. Improved quality is expected to increase coffee-based household income by about 60%.



SUPPORTING BRANDING, CERTIFICATION AND MARKET LINKAGE:

Ethiopia's diverse coffee varieties, flavours, and natural forest-friendly production methods should provide Ethiopian wild coffee producers and the country with a comparative advantage in the international speciality coffee market. In most cases, farmers are growing their own wild grown varieties, unique to this area. Most of these have not even been classified and branded. To achieve global competitiveness and ensure better prices for producers, branding and certification of the varieties and production system needs to be embedded in the coffee trading system. Farm Africa assists farmers in branding and certification, which will enable them to secure considerably better prices for this high quality coffee in a niche market. Farm Africa is also working to set up a forest coffee union, so that member farmers will be able to sell their produce in bulk for a much better price.



PROTECTING THE FOREST:

Fetching an appropriate price for their premium certified wild coffee will be a lasting incentive for forest communities to protect the natural forest resources, reducing deforestation and desertification and helping to tackle climate change by having more trees that can absorb carbon dioxide emitted by human activities.

