

PRODUCER PROFILE

Name: Bench Maji Forest Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union

Product: Coffee

Country: Ethiopia

FLO ID: 31896

Fairtrade Certified Since: 2005

Number of Certified Members: 3,388

Type of Organisation: Small Producer Organisation (SPO)



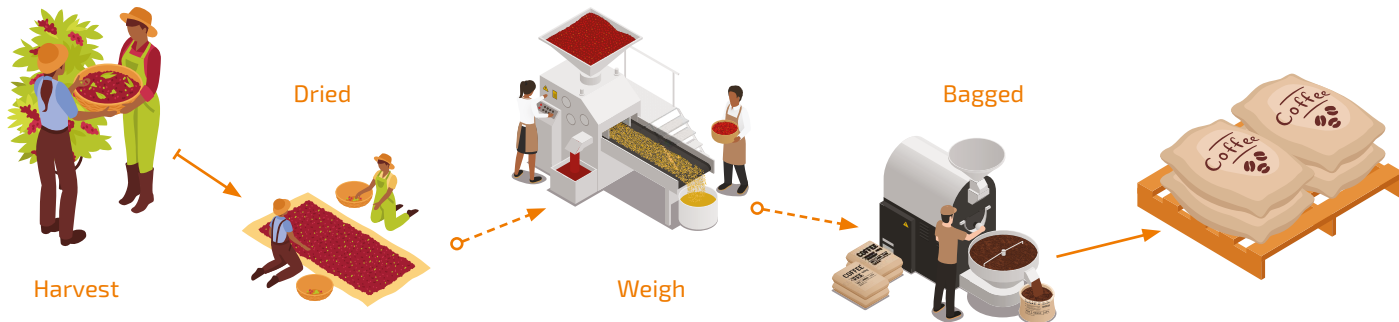
Introduction

Bench Maji Forest Coffee Producer Farmers' Cooperative Union (also known as Bench Maji Forest Coffee Union (BMFCU)) is a farmer based organic coffee, spices and honey producer organization based in the Bench Sheko zone of South-western Ethiopia.

The union was originally formed in 2005 by 14 founding primary cooperatives, which united to commercialize their coffee and market their products internationally. 85 cooperatives are now affiliated under the service of BMFCU. We are Fairtrade, Organic and Rainforest Alliance certified. Within the 85 primary cooperative structure the number of our individual farmer members is 21,350 farmers. In total, over 74.51% are men and 25.49% are female. Members also cultivate several other products including fruits and vegetables, grain and cattle.

Our farmer members are based in the Bench Maji forest region where wild coffee trees grow naturally under shade. The forest based farm products (coffee, spices and honey) are fully organic and some parts of the farm area are left to grow naturally with no intervention until it is harvested under the dense forest.

Coffee Growing & Processing



Ethiopia's Bench Maji zone is densely forested and known for its wild, naturally occurring coffee trees. The region's altitude and favourable climate create ideal conditions for coffee cultivation.

The primary cooperatives prepare washed and sun dried coffee, black cardamom, black pepper, turmeric and honey at their processing stations.

BMFCU also has a central washing and drying station and owns its cupping laboratory and warehouses. Producers pick ripe coffee cherries and harvest them in Bench Maji's forests. The union grows and harvests several types of coffee with varying levels of human intervention. These include forest coffee, semi-forest coffee, and fully wild coffee.

Members harvest coffee in the forests and then deliver them to the union for washing, drying, and processing. After this, the coffee is transported to the Port of Djibouti for international export.

Coffee Profile



Altitude:
1400 - 2500



Total area under production:
24,089 ha



Growing Practice:
100% Organic



Smallholders:
1.7 ha on average



Harvest Period:
September-January



Processing Type:
Fully washed/ Sun-dried



Other Certifications:
EU & NOP Organic,
COP, UTZ and RA

Benefits of Fairtrade

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Fairtrade certification offers numerous advantages to producer organizations and their communities, as exemplified by the Bench Maji Forest Coffee Union (BMFCU). This narrative highlights how Fairtrade initiatives promote sustainable development and improve members' quality of life.

Decision-Making and Governance

BMFCU's General Assembly is the union's highest decision-making body and convenes annually. Each primary cooperative sends three delegates to participate in these meetings and the monthly management committee. This structure ensures a participatory and democratic governance system, with elected management committee members representing each village.

Investment in Local Development

Fairtrade certified producer organizations (POs) are encouraged to invest their Fairtrade premiums in local development projects. This approach enhances coffee quality and sustainability, improving living standards and ensuring long-term prosperity for communities.

Quality and Productivity Enhancement

Bench Maji has identified 40 cooperatives with additional potential for improving coffee quality. Members receive training in various techniques, including pre- and post-harvest processes, to enhance productivity and maintain high standards.

Environmental Conservation

The union's Fairtrade cooperatives dedicate 30 hectares to biodiversity and conservation, preserving 28,000 hectares of wild coffee-growing forest. BMFCU is fully organic, avoiding pesticides and fertilizers, and maintains buffer zones around water bodies to prevent contamination.

Training and Capacity Building

Producers receive training funded by Fairtrade premiums in farm management, harvesting, and coffee washing techniques. Bench Maji also provides training in agroforestry production systems and ecosystem maintenance. Moreover, training on Environmental and Human Rights Due Diligence (EHRDD) and geolocation mapping prepares them for compliance with upcoming EU regulations on deforestation-free coffee exports.

Raising Awareness

BMFCU runs a public radio program funded by Fairtrade premiums, broadcasting twice weekly in local languages. The program covers Fairtrade awareness, good agricultural practices, and social issues like child and forced labor protection, gender-based violence prevention, and environmental protection. This initiative informs and empowers communities throughout the Bench Maji Zone and neighboring areas. Through these initiatives, Fairtrade certification fosters sustainable development, enhances coffee quality, and improves the livelihoods of producers and their communities.







Challenges

- Illegal traders and middlemen work in the region. Ensuring members are protected from this, is one of Bench Maji's central values.
- This part of Ethiopia is particularly underdeveloped and in need of significant infrastructure development.


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