

# Coffee Farmer Learning Strategy

East African Coffee Initiative, TechnoServe  
Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia



## The Initiative

East Africa is home to millions of small-holder coffee farmers. TechnoServe, a non-governmental organization (NGO), set out to improve the livelihood of coffee farmers by changing traditional processing methods, and increasing yields.

## Issue

Subsistence coffee farmers produced limited yields and dried coffee cherry in the hulls. Dry-processing coffee can impart off-flavors, making it unsalable in today's upscale, gourmet coffee market.

Few regions can produce high-quality, dry processed coffees. Upscale coffee purveyors sell mostly washed coffees with bright, clean flavor profiles. Coffee buyers pay a premium for beans that meet superb quality standards and exhibit flavor characteristics unique to their region.

Small-holder farmers are located in remote villages with little infrastructure. Washed coffees require fresh water, washing stations and drying tables. Only a pooled volume of multiple farmers would justify such investments. Managing the business of organized farmer groups takes business and finance skills.

Most coffee farmers have little in the way of formal education or agronomy training. Existing agronomy practices limited yield and ignored plant health. Basic practices for pruning, integrated pest management and organic fertilizers could significantly increase yields. Selecting and managing harvested coffee cherry improves quality.

How do you change traditional practices handed down through generations? Where will farmers learn new methods, operate equipment and run a business?



## Solution

To change traditional practices of smallholder coffee farmers required a learning strategy and culture shift. This included:

- Construct wetmills to wet process coffee cherry and improve quality
- Organize farmer groups around wetmills for efficiency and financing
- Design a curriculum on coffee agronomy, harvesting, wet processing and business operations
- Organize a framework of outreach and extension for sharing best practices
- Develop a cadre of agronomy and business advisors to coach and sustain learning

Tending to agronomy practices and shifting processing methods improved coffee quality and yields. Increased yields and improved quality raised farmer incomes and changed the lives of smallholder farmers.

