

Organic Coffee Production: Hope for Small-Scale Farmers in Ethiopia

T. KUFA, T. SHIMBER

Ethiopian Agriculture Research Organization, Jimma Agricultural Research Centre,
P. O. Box 192, Jimma, Ethiopia

SUMMARY

In Ethiopia, coffee is grown under four main production systems. These include, forest, semi-forest, garden and plantation coffee, which account for 10, 35, 50 and 5% of the total volume produced in the country, respectively. In other words, smallholder, rain-fed and generally low input-output oriented cropping system, predominantly characterizes coffee based farming system. That means ninety-five percent of the coffee production system is based on traditional practices under natural forest canopy and can be considered as bird friendly or shade grown organic coffee, although not yet officially documented and certified. Besides the traditional farming, the immense genetic potential in Ethiopia helped breeding works to select coffee types adaptable, tolerant to diseases and insect pests in the local climates. The use of proper management practices, including maintenance of tree vigor through pruning and rejuvenation, optimum planting pattern and shade regulations to disfavor diseases, insects and weeds and recycling of organic materials to maintain soil fertility greatly helped to circumvent yield losses and curtailed the use of agro-chemical inputs. In other words, organic coffee production with minimum use of non-renewable resources and minimum destruction to the environment deserved closer attention at the whole range coffee production. *In-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation of coffee gene pool and complementing farmer's indigenous knowledge also become important research aspects. In light of the existing agro-ecological and socio-economic opportunities, it is therefore imperative to formulate a platform for the key stakeholders involved in coffee productions with the interest to create awareness and provide efficient record keeping taking into account the standard criteria for quality control of smallholder farmers'. On the whole, maximum exploitation of the existing untapped potentials to produce organic coffee in Ethiopia requires the assistance of global organic coffee consumers as well to support and facilitate the certification process. This would ensure not only to export accredited demand led fully organic coffee but also it is the only hope for small-scale coffee farmers to sustain coffee cultivation and gain from the premium prices offered for it.