



*A farmer harvesting coffee. Photo Credit: Trading Room.*

# Keeping coffee diseases , pests at bay

By Waithaka Mwangi

**H**istorically coffee growers in Kenya were considered 'wealthy' and the crop fondly referred to as the 'black gold'. In the recent past, however, those farmers have had mixed fortunes. Sometimes they have been pretty miserable, with nothing to show for their sweat. The coffee 'boom' years in Kenya often resulted from the misfortunes of key competitors in the Arabica coffee trade. Brazil, for instance, would sometimes experience frost attacks which would destroy its coffee trees, and Kenya would benefit from the increased demand created on the market.

But coffee remains the second most traded commodity in the world after oil. Coffee trade is also seen as stable, with no coffee bean going unsold. On the flip side, the coffee trade margins are very lean, especially to the last 'hand' to be paid, that is the farmer. The Kenyan farmer often

finds herself or himself in a very vulnerable position amid price swings.

Although coffee production is still the most attractive farming enterprise, farmers face many other challenges. Inputs, including directly purchased fertilisers, manures and pesticides, take a very significant portion of their farm budgets. Manual labour, usually for pruning, weeding and picking coffee cherry, does not come cheap as well. Other services such as pulping, milling, grading and marketing must be procured, adding to the farmer's cost woes! Covid shutdowns, the effects of climate change and now the war in Russia/Ukraine have seen the prices of inputs, especially fertilisers, skyrocketing. However, all is not lost for Kenyan farmers who produce some of the best-flavoured rated specialty coffee in the world.

Coffee beans are normally graded via a sophisticated system before being sold. These are E, PB, AA, AB, C, TT, T and MH & ML; E (elephants) being best and T the lowest. A farmer who produces a specified quantity of cherry per tree is also honoured with higher grades. If coffee cherry is badly handled after picking and the subsequent processing, the grading and prices would be negatively affected.

A lot of good work is being done, for instance, in training of small-scale farmers by private and public institutions to change the old farming cultures. Coffee input subsidy programmes have been initiated. Extensive research has yielded value adding coffee varieties and better farming practices, including climate-smart techniques. At the regional and international levels, we have certification programmes which mainly aim to ensure sustainable coffee production through environmental protection as well as fairness and equity in its trade.



Some of the organisations offering these programmes are Fairtrade, Bird-friendly (Smithsonian) Rainforest Alliance and Organic. There are also private and voluntary initiatives such as 4C Association, Caffe Practices and Nespresso.

All these organisations attempt to improve farmers' incomes and make coffee farming sustainable. It should be noted, however, that the certification programmes can sometimes be pretty expensive to the farmers and their producer organisations.

#### Juanco SPS Ltd in Coffee

Juanco SPS has been an unwavering agrochemicals partner with the coffee industry across the greater East and Horn of Africa region. We have been working with both large and smallholder farmers, their producer organisations, research institutes, governments and coffee service providers. We have an elaborate network of trained coffee agronomists in all the coffee growing areas in the region.

We are visibly present in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania, from Songea, through Njombe, Mafinga to Iringa, Kilimanjaro, Arusha, and Karatu areas to the north and further west in Kigoma and Kagera. We also have a presence in Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo, Uganda as well as Ethiopia (where we are working with big farms like Bebek and Limu). We listen, then develop practical solutions to coffee farming challenges.

Over time, we have developed many innovative products in response to the changing coffee ecosystems. Recently, product safety and environmental protection have been the major concerns. In response, we have developed products like Kilifos (a fungicide) and Pyegar (insecticide) that are organically certified for use on coffee farms.

Our leading products in Coffee are:



A coffee tree. Photo Credit: Waithaka Mwangi.

No.	Product Description	
1	KILIFOS An organic fungicide for control of Coffee Berry Disease (CBD) and Coffee Leaf Rust (CLR)	4
2	Phoscare / Phosgard A specially formulated foliar applied fertiliser which contains most of the macro and micro nutrients required by coffee, including Boron and Zinc.	5
3	Pyegar A general insecticide that controls scales, thrips, antestia, and berry moth.	
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4	Impact Guard	A highly effective 2-way combination fungicide for control of both CBD and CLR
5	Dynopack	The only existing product for control of soil-borne pests and diseases. Dynopack will control pests like Chauffer grubs and nematodes and diseases like Fusarium and Phytophthora of coffee and other tree crops. A single application rejuvenates dying trees and restores vibrant health.