



## COFFEE FARMING TOPIC 11: HARVESTING COFFEE CHERRIES

Harvesting coffee is the process of collecting fully ripe coffee cherries that have reached the appropriate maturity level. In Rwanda, ripe coffee is usually red at the time of harvesting, although there are also varieties where the cherries are yellow, in order to obtain coffee with high yield and good quality. In Rwanda, harvesting is done by hand, leaving the coffee stem (calyx) attached to the branch. The point where the calyx attaches to the branch is where the flowers of the next year's coffee will develop.

It is normal for all the cherries on a single tree not to ripen at the same time; therefore, only the red, ripe cherries are to be harvested.

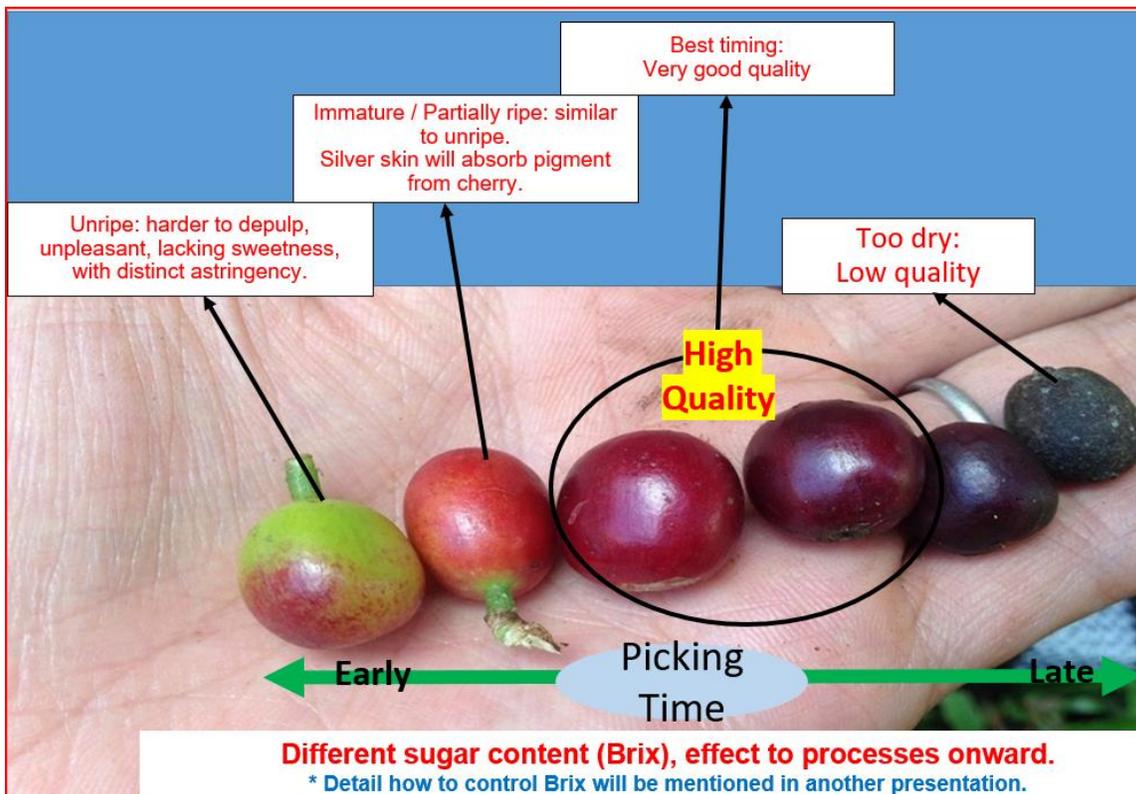
### Importance of Picking Only Ripe Cherries



- Well-ripened cherries are easier to process into high-quality parchment coffee without crushing.
- Fully ripe cherries have a higher sugar content.
- Properly ripened cherries weigh more, allowing the farmer to earn more income.
- Fully ripe cherries produce a better-tasting coffee that is preferred by buyers and can be sold at a higher price



The **cherry paddle** is used to measure the percentage of harvested beans, showing the proportion of properly harvested, fully ripe, and overripe cherries.



The Diagram above shows coffee that is fully ripe and ready for harvesting.

<Tool for measuring the sugar content in coffee cherries>



(Brix meter. Brix indicates a level of sugar content)

- Losses for a farmer harvesting improperly ripe coffee cherries:
- Unripe cherries are difficult to pick, making harvesting more labor-intensive and requiring more effort from the farmer.
- Unripe cherries bring along their parchment, and instead of leaving the parchment on the branches, the harvested branches lose their potential for future flowering. As a result, the farmer loses yield for the following year.
- Cherries that have not fully ripened have little weight, so their quality and density are low. The farmer loses kilograms because the coffee does not reach the expected weight.
- Unripe cherries lead to poor drying and many defects. When coffee is processed, buyers find defective beans and pay much less, jeopardizing the future of that coffee crop. Buyers may be reluctant to purchase coffee from those farmers again.

**Frequency of harvesting coffee trees:**

- **Harvest every 7–14 days**, depending on weather conditions. If you harvest too frequently, the cherries will not have ripened properly. If you wait too long between

harvests, you will find that the coffee cherries have passed the optimal ripeness stage and have begun to dry on the tree.

- **Start early in the morning** so that the harvested cherries can be delivered to the factory promptly.
- Coffee must be delivered to the factory **within 8 hours after harvesting** to prevent fermentation in the cherries, which would negatively affect their flavor.

### Equipment used in harvesting



- Use buckets, trays, or other clean tools that can help you harvest coffee efficiently. Harvest fully ripe coffee carefully, leaving the cherry stem (peduncle) on the branch, as this is where new flowers will emerge, ensuring the next harvest.

### Precautions during harvesting

- Avoid tying ropes to tall coffee trees and shaking them to reach the cherries, as this can break the branches, causing losses for the farmer.
- Prune frequently or shorten the coffee tree to prevent it from growing excessively tall.

### Handling coffee cherries after harvest

- Examples of bags that can be used for harvesting and delivering coffee cherries:
- Use clean bags, place the coffee cherries inside, and transport them to the coffee processing factory.
- Harvested cherries should be delivered to the factory on the same day, within eight hours, to prevent fermentation in the field, which significantly reduces coffee quality.



- Farmers who delay delivering their coffee are paid much less because the quality of their coffee deteriorates.
- Poor-quality cherries mixed with good ones are sold at different prices at the processing factory.
- Avoid sitting on or placing heavy objects on bags containing coffee cherries, as this damages them.
- Do not put foreign materials such as stones, metal pieces, plastic, or any other objects in the cherries, as these can damage the coffee processing machines.

### How to practice crop hygiene?



“Cleaning coffee plants” refers to the removal of diseased, dried, or damaged plant parts before and after harvesting.

It helps reduce the incidence of pests and diseases, especially leaf rust and other leaf-related diseases.

It contributes to improving the quality of coffee.

Cleaning coffee plants should be carried out at the end of each harvesting period.

These removed cherries can also be collected and properly processed. Avoid leaving or discarding them in the field.