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Climate Change and Coffee Production

By: www.BuyOrganicCoffee.org

As climate change raises temperatures across the globe, production of high-quality Arabica coffee will suffer. Arabica coffee already needs to be grown at higher and higher altitudes in order to avoid [leaf rust](#). As temperatures climb, farmers need to plant more leaf rust [resistant coffee strains](#). Some of these, like [Caturra](#), are high quality Arabica coffee while others like high-caffeine Robusta give you leaf rust resistant coffee with little taste. Climate change and coffee production concerns have brought to mind so-called forgotten coffee plants that grow well in warmer climates like Stenophylla, a West African wild coffee strain which is currently not economically viable due to low yield and small berries.

Loss of Productive Farmland for Growing Coffee

Coffee industry sources predict that by 2050 half of the farmland currently being used to produce high-quality Arabica coffee will no longer be suitable for growing these coffees. First of all, lower altitudes will get hotter and increase the risk of leaf rust infestations. Next, higher temperatures are not the only thing that happens with climate change. Excessive rain and droughts can destroy crops as more heat pumps more energy into the atmosphere. This will make it impossible in some areas to predict whether coffee planted in an area will be able to produce a harvest five to fifteen years later. Thus, we may be drinking drought-resistant coffees, lots of leaf rust resistant Robusta, and, hopefully, newer Arabica varieties that are tolerant of heat and infestations.

Taming Wild Coffee Varieties

Coffee grows wild in Ethiopia and other parts of East and even West Africa. The reason that Arabica and Robusta are the dominant commercial strains is that coffee farmers can make a living by planting these crops and getting a sufficient harvest, at a high enough price to make a business of it. Stenophylla is a wild coffee strain that grows wild in Sierra Leone. It tastes great and is tolerant of heat and leaf rust. Unfortunately for coffee farmers it produces small berries and coffee beans and not very many. As such, Stenophylla is not a commercially viable coffee at this time. This strain of coffee will need to be crossbred just like Arabica was crossbred with a leaf rust resistant strain from Timor to produce the leaf rust resistant strains that saved the Colombian coffee industry. If history is any guide, this will take ten, twenty, or thirty years. If such a project works out, we could be drinking coffee derived from this wild strain that can stand temperatures as much as six degrees Celsius higher than Arabica can tolerate.

Where Will Arabica Coffee Grow?

Arabica is the preferred coffee worldwide due to its taste and aroma. It grows in mountainous regions and today accounts for sixty percent of all coffee production. In the Colombian coffee growing region in the Andes, Arabica coffee is already grown at five to seven thousand feet and there is room to grow higher in the mountains should temperatures continue to rise. Lower altitudes like three to five thousand feet will be used

for leaf rust resistant strains and probably more Robusta. The use of higher altitudes will give coffee producers a couple of decades grace but eventually either new strains will need to be produced to tolerate increased temperatures or there will simply be less Arabica coffee available at increasingly higher prices.

For more insights and useful information about organic coffee, visit www.BuyOrganicCoffee.org.

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