Organic Coffee from the Quarry: A Kenyan Farmer's Success Story

Jack Melly, a coffee farmer in Kenya's Rift Valley, embarked on a remarkable journey in 2021 with a clear vision—to transform an abandoned, barren quarry into a thriving coffee farm. What was once a site of industrial decay has now blossomed into a vibrant, productive landscape, a testament to the power of sustainability, innovation, and dedication. For Mr. Melly, who is also the Director of Kiqwetu, the estate is not just a coffee farm but a symbol of resilience, innovation, and the power of partnership.

The Beginning: A Quarry in Despair

When he first encountered the quarry, it was a desolate site in the middle of a sugarcane belt. Years of mining and neglect had left the land depleted, the soil infertile, and the ecosystem collapsed. It was a place where no life seemed to thrive. But he saw potential where others saw none. He believed that with care, determination, and the right approach, this land could be revitalized—not just to its original state but to something far greater: a thriving organic coffee farm that could contribute to the environment, the local community, and the economy of Kenya.

A Vision for Renewal: Sustainable Reclamation

Mr. Koskei's mission was very clear—to rehabilitate the quarry—and was anchored in sustainability focused on rebuilding the soil, conserving water, and restoring biodiversity. His roadmap was clear and encompassed the following:

Restoring the Soil: The first step was soil rejuvenation. Mr. Melly brought in organic matter, planted cover crops, and implemented composting techniques to restore nutrients and microbial life. Slowly but surely, the barren land began to show signs of vitality.

Water Management and Conservation: The quarry had poor drainage, which made managing water a challenge. Mr. Melly redesigned the landscape, introduced drip irrigation systems, and implemented water conservation methods like terracing for drainage of excess water during rain season and mulching to support healthy plant growth for moisture retention.

Biodiversity Restoration: To bring the ecosystem back to life, the farmer planted native trees like Cordia Africana and other plants alongside coffee. These plants helped restore soil structure, provide shade, and create a habitat for wildlife, ultimately enhancing the ecosystem.

The Birth of Kiqwetu Coffee: A Commitment to Organic Farming

As the land began to 'heal', Melly turned his attention to coffee production, choosing to pursue organic farming, not only for the high-quality yield but also to protect the soil, conserve water, and support local biodiversity.

"This is where our partnership with the *TRACE Kenya* project came into play," Melly explained. "The project played a pivotal role by offering regular training in organic farming methods. These sessions provided us with invaluable skills in proper planting techniques, pest management, and composting, which were crucial in building a healthier, more sustainable coffee farm."

Melly's dedication to organic practices and sustainable land management was unwavering. He worked closely with agronomists and sustainability experts, including the *TRACE Kenya project* team, to carefully analyze the unique conditions of the former quarry and develop tailored approaches to revitalization. Through careful experimentation and ongoing adaptation, Melly refined his techniques in soil management, water conservation, and climate adaptation through agroforestry, demonstrating that even the most damaged landscapes could be restored with targeted effort and expert guidance.

The Transformation: A Thriving Organic Coffee Farm

Today, Kiqwetu is a living proof of regeneration. The once-abandoned quarry has been transformed into a thriving organic coffee farm with healthy coffee of 14639 plants of Ruiru 11 and Batian Variety on 25 acres of land and nutrient-rich soil, surrounded by lush greenery and biodiversity. The land, once barren, is now alive with birds, pollinators, and wildlife. The air is fresher, cleaner, and more vibrant.

The impact of this transformation extends far beyond the farm. The local community has benefited from the knowledge shared by TRACE Kenya, and the surrounding ecosystem has been restored to health.

Today, Kiqwetu Estate has achieved **EU organic certification**, a testament to Melly's commitment to sustainable and ethical practices. This certification not only enhances the farm's credentials and attracts conscientious consumers but also opens doors to new market opportunities in Europe and the USA.

Melly is strongly convinced that Kiqwetu's transformation can inspire other farmers. "If an abandoned quarry can be rehabilitated into a thriving certified organic coffee farm," he said, "then other lands can be restored as well." His story is one of hope, resilience, and the transformative power of sustainable agriculture. Melly aims to inspire farmers across the region and beyond to embrace similar practices and contribute to a greener future.

"At Kiqwetu, we're not just growing coffee," Melly emphasizes, "we're nurturing the earth, building resilience, and sowing the seeds of a more sustainable future for all."

About TRACE Kenya

The DMDP-funded Traceable Organic Coffee from Kenya project (TRACE Kenya), is supporting smallholder coffee farmers (30% women; 10% youth) to enable them to adopt responsible farming practices and convert from conventional to organic coffee production. TRACE Kenya is offering tailored interventions, including interactive training on innovative organic coffee practices, facilitating access to high-yielding and disease-resistant coffee varietie,s and promoting eco-friendly technologies for organic coffee production. By promoting the adoption of innovative organic agricultural practices to 22,976 coffee farmers in the project regions (Kericho, Nandi, and Bungoma Counties), TRACE Kenya has also paved the way for the development of organic inputs supply chains and innovations which alongside the project interventions are anticipated to contribute to improved farmers' productivity (volumes and quality), increased farmers' incomes and creation of decent jobs. More specifically, TRACE Kenya is also contributing to job creation for youth in coffee. The project is

equipping youth with the requisite skills and knowledge to enable them to explore on-and-off-farm enterprises (economic opportunities).

Photos

Original Version:

Kiqwetu Success Story: Rehabilitating an Abandoned Quarry into a Thriving Organic Coffee Farm

Our Journey: From Ruin to Resilience

Jack Melly the director Kiqwetu Estate, he embarked on a remarkable journey with a clear vision—transforming an abandoned, barren quarry into a thriving organic coffee farm. What was once a site of industrial decay has now blossomed into a vibrant, productive landscape, a testament to the power of sustainability, innovation, and dedication.

The Beginning: A Quarry in Despair

When he first encountered the quarry, it was a desolate site in the middle of a sugarcane belt. Years of mining and neglect had left the land depleted, the soil infertile, and the ecosystem collapsed. It was a place where no life seemed to thrive. But he saw potential where others saw ruin. He believed that with care, determination, and the right approach, this land could be revitalized—not just to its original state, but to something far greater: a thriving organic coffee farm that could contribute to the environment, the local community, and the economy of the country.

A Vision for Renewal: Sustainable Reclamation

The mission to rehabilitate the quarry was anchored in sustainability focused on rebuilding the soil, conserving water, and restoring biodiversity.

1. Restoring the Soil: The first step was soil rejuvenation. Jay brought in organic matter, planted cover crops, and implemented composting techniques to restore nutrients and microbial life. Slowly but surely, the barren land began to show signs of vitality.
2. Water Management and Conservation: The quarry had poor drainage, which made managing water a challenge. He redesigned the landscape, introduced irrigation systems, and implemented water conservation methods to support healthy plant growth while minimizing waste.
3. Biodiversity Restoration: To bring the ecosystem back to life, planted native trees and other plants alongside the coffee crops. These plants helped restore soil structure, provide shade, and create a habitat for wildlife, ultimately enhancing the ecosystem.

The Birth of Kiqwetu Coffee: A Commitment to Organic Farming

Jack Melly narrates the birth of kiqwetu

"As the land began to heal, i turned the attention to the coffee itself and chose to pursue organic farming, not only for the high-quality coffee yield but also to ensure that the farming practices would protect the soil, conserve water, and support local biodiversity.This is where our partnership with Solidaridad came into play. They played a pivotal role by offering regular training in organic farming methods. These training sessions provided us with invaluable skills in proper planting techniques, pest management, and composting, which were crucial in building a healthier, more sustainable coffee crop. The process also opened up new opportunities for income and growth, benefiting both us and the community'.

He continuous to narrate:*The journey wasn't without its challenges. The land had been abandoned for years, and the soil quality was poor. But i persisted, working closely with agronomists and sustainability experts, including those from Solidaridad, to monitor and adjust the approaches. Through trial and error, I developed a system that worked—demonstrating that even the most damaged landscapes could be restored with the right resources and dedication."*

The Transformation: A Thriving Organic Coffee Farm

Today, the farm is a living proof of regeneration. The once-abandoned quarry has been transformed into a thriving organic coffee farm. Healthy coffee plants now thrive in nutrient-rich soil, surrounded by lush greenery and biodiversity. The land, once barren, is now alive with birds, pollinators, and wildlife. The air is fresher, cleaner, and more vibrant.

The impact of this transformation extends far beyond the farm. The local community has benefited from the knowledge shared by Solidaridad, and the surrounding ecosystem has been restored to health.There is also an enthusiastic support for organic coffee, which is now valued for its sustainable, ethically produced qualities.

The Certification journey with EU organic certification has been achieved and looking forward to having more for future sustainability which will enhance.These certifications will enhance the Kiqwetu credentials, attract conscientious consumers, and open new market opportunities.

He believes that if an abandoned quarry can be rehabilitated into a thriving certified organic coffee farm, then other lands can be restored as well. The story is one of hope, resilience, and the possibilities of sustainable agriculture. Jack aims to inspire other farmers in the region and beyond to embrace these practices and contribute to a more sustainable future.

Quote :*"At Kiqwetu, we're not just growing coffee—we're nurturing the earth, building resilience, and sowing the seeds of a more sustainable future for all"* Says Jack

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This success story of Kiqwetu Estate under the Trace Project—the rehabilitation of land from a quarry to an organic farm—serves as a powerful reminder that with vision, determination, and the right partnerships, even the most challenging spaces can be transformed into something beautiful, productive, and environmentally beneficial.