



## **RWANDA NYAMASHEKE KIVUBELT MURUNDO PEOPLES FARMAS GRAINPRO**

**Notes:** CHERRY, LIME, COLA, CHOCOLATE, SWEET

### **ORIGIN INFORMATION**

Grower	500 smallholders organized around the Murundo Coffee Washing Station
Variety	Local bourbon varieties
Region	Mahembe Sector, Nyamasheke District, Western Province, Rwanda
Harvest	March-July
Altitude	1700-1800 masl
Soil	Volcanic loam
Process	Fully washed and dried on raised beds
Certifications	Conventional

### **BACKGROUND DETAILS**

The Nyamasheke district in Rwanda is gifted in terroir. The cool, humid climates of both Lake Kivu and the Nyungwe Forest National Park keep groundwater abundant throughout the uniquely hilly region. Kivu itself is part of the East African Rift whose consistent drift creates volcanic seepage from the lake's bottom and enriches the surrounding soils. Coffees from this region are often jammier and heavier than in the rest of the country. Murundo's coffees in particular are full of complex sugars, currant-like acids, blackberry and spice flavors, and round, soft textures.

Kivubelt was established in 2011 by Furaha Umwizey, after returning to Rwanda with a master's degree in economics from Switzerland. Born and raised in Rwanda, Umwizey's goal with Kivubelt is to create a model coffee plantation, as sustainable in agriculture as it is impactful in local employment and empowerment. The company began with 200 scattered acres of farmland in Gihombo, a community in Nyamasheke district that runs along the breathtaking central shoreline of Lake Kivu.

Under Umwizey's leadership, Kivubelt has planted 90,000 coffee trees on their estates, which now employ more than 400 people during harvest months and is a kind of coffee vocational school for local smallholders interested in improving their farming. Kivubelt



has also acquired two washing stations, Murundo and Jarama, which combined not only process coffee from the company's estates, but also that of more than 500 smallholders in the region, offering quality premiums and training programs for participating farming families. Because coffee is often the only source of family income, the price premiums provided by Kivubelt have in many cases made possible things like house repairs, school fees, the purchasing of livestock, and the expansion of the farmland itself. In addition to farmer benefits, Murundo employs up to 600 local staff during harvest time to manage processing, operations, storage, and security, which makes them one of the largest job providers in the area.

Processing at Murundo works like many top-quality central processing sites in Nyamasheke: cherry is grown and harvested by individual family farms and brought to the processing site for inspection. Depulping is done with a McKinnon disc pulper, a large, long piece of equipment that uses flotation channels immediately after depulping to separate parchment coffee by density and is used commonly in central Kenya. Depulped and fermented parchment is cleaned and then immediately hand-sorted on the drying tables for visible imperfections. The parchment is continuously rotated throughout the drying process, before being transferred to an aerated warehouse for storage and conditioning.

Coffee estates like Kivubelt's are rare in Rwanda, where coffee was originally forced upon remote communities by the Belgians as a colony-funding cash crop. The Belgians distributed varieties cultivated by the French on Ile de Bourbon (now Reunion Island, near Madagascar) but had so little invested in coffee's success that they immediately allowed it to decline through lack of investment in both infrastructure and the farmers who grew it. As a result the sector suffered near total obscurity in the coffee world from Rwanda's independence in 1962 until the period of rebuilding following the country's devastating civil war and astonishingly tragic genocide in 1994.

In the late 2000's, thanks to one of East Africa's most successful coffee interventions, the Partnership for Enhancing Agriculture in Rwanda Through Linkages (PEARL), Rwanda's coffee potential was renewed in the eyes of the international market. PEARL was a sweeping infrastructure and education investment targeting large regions of Rwanda whose coffee was for the most part processed poorly at home and exported with little traceability. The program, designed and led by the University of Michigan, Texas A&M and a host of Rwandan organizations, vastly increased processing hygiene by building washing stations. It also organized remote and under-resourced smallholders into cooperative businesses capable of specialty partnerships. Perhaps most significantly for the long term, it took the legacy bourbon genetics buried in abandon and polished them anew to the amazement of coffee drinkers everywhere.

In the decade following PEARL and subsequent investments in the country's coffee sector, Rwanda, one of the most rapidly modernizing countries on the continent, has built steadily on top of those first coffees, and we as buyers now have an awe-inspiring reference for how snappy, mouth-watering, and kaleidoscopic the bourbon lineage can be. Kivubelt is one example of focused entrepreneurship aimed at a very specific landscape.