

## Chapter 1: A new co-operative

**ETHIOPIA IS THE LARGEST PRODUCER OF COFFEE IN AFRICA. MORE THAN 15 MILLION PEOPLE DEPEND ON COFFEE FARMING TO SURVIVE.**

Tadesse Meskela is a large, friendly man. He grew up in the countryside outside Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa. His family were farmers. Tadesse remembers walking to school without shoes. His parents were too poor to buy him any. It was a long journey: two hours there, and two hours back.

To escape this life, Tadesse worked very hard at school. He passed his exams and won a place at university. After university, he worked as a top advisor in Ethiopia's Agricultural Bureau\*. It was a very good job. But it wasn't enough. There was something more important Tadesse wanted to do. He wanted to help his country's farmers get a fair price for their coffee. But how could they do this?

One answer was to sell straight to the coffee buyers themselves, without using middlemen. To do this, they needed to work together. They needed to form a co-operative. But a co-operative needs a manager. This gave Tadesse his next big idea.

In 1999, he went to Japan to study how co-operatives work. He returned home later that year and started the Oromia Coffee Farmers' Co-operative Union.

\* A government office that manages farming.

There are now 101 co-operatives in Tadesse's Union, with more than 74,000 farmers.

The idea of a co-operative is for people to help themselves by working together. Tadesse knows they won't achieve success if they are careless. This is a point he makes to the workers in the Export Processing Centre in Addis Ababa. Coffee is processed here before it is sent to customers.

'I'm not pleased with the quality of these sacks,' Tadesse says to a group of workers. 'They don't look clean. Were they washed?'

The workers don't reply. They turn away, looking uncomfortable.



Tadesse picks some coffee beans from one of the sacks. 'These are Harar beans,' he explains. He smells the beans. 'Harar is one of the best coffees in the world. Our co-operative also produces Sidamo and Yirgacheffe coffees. All three are of the highest quality. No coffee in the world is better, but we are getting a very low price. This doesn't help our people.' He points to sacks and sacks