

Book review

Thomas Oberthür, Peter Läderach, H. A. Jürgen Pohlen & James H. Cock (2012)

Specialty Coffee: Managing Quality

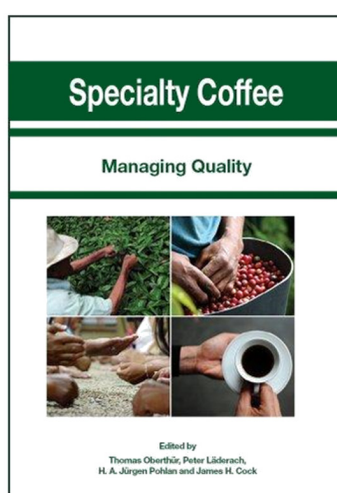
International Plant Nutrition Institute, Southeast Asia Program (IPNI SEAP), Penang, Malaysia,
x +347 pp., 36 tables, 68 figures, hardcover, ISBN 13: 978-983-445-0311

The definition of „specialty coffee“ in its beginning was similar to the wine model and quite simple: “Special geographic microclimates and soils produce coffee with unique flavour profiles”. While in the case of wine, the final product is created completely under responsibility of one single farmer or company, in coffee the situation is much more complex and vulnerable. The food chain begins at the farm, before the coffee cherries come to millers, to intermediaries, to exporters, to roasters and finally to the consumers. Every step in this chain does influence coffee quality. For specialty coffee in its long journey from the tree to the cup, specific parameters and standards for each region, product and actor in the whole process must be analysed and defined.

This extraordinary complex task requires an orchestrated collaboration from experts in different scientific fields, achieved successfully by the four editors with 42 contributors.

In the foreword, the global issues of coffee production and consumption of the last 40 years are presented and the urgent need for more sustainable crop practices and management options is outlined. The introduction chapter gives a good overview about coffee quality, including the production system, inherent quality factors and taste.

The background and concepts for better taste are subject in part one of the book, detailed in four chapters.



Examples are given to compare different coffee growing regions, e.g. Ethiopia and Costa Rica. An outstanding chapter is the analysis of climate change in Mesoamerica on coffee. At the first time for this crop, climate and geographic models are combined. Many high risk areas for future coffee growing are identified, but some potential new areas too.

In part two, the crop management of specialty coffee is presented in six chapters. All important components are involved, from coffee physiology, breeding, plant nutrition, field management practices, the impact of pests and diseases until the complete post-harvesting coffee processing. Particular emphasis is given to an integrated approach to meet changing climatic conditions and to minimise environmental degradation.

The third part of this remarkable book deals with the value chain management in five chapters. Prerequisites of business models that ensure equitable benefits all along the supply chain are outlined in chapter 3.1 and illustrated with case studies in the next chapter. The impact of these business models on coffee producers is analysed in chapter 3.3 with special emphasis to reduce seasonal food insecurity. Recommendations for measuring green coffee quality on farm level are given in chapter 3.4. Finally, chapter 3.5. illustrates how modern information technology can improve management of the supply chain.

All single chapters contain an actual bibliography, facilitating deeper insights in specific areas. This book is the first comprehensive roadmap for managing specialty coffee. The exemplary prediction of climate change on coffee growing in Mesoamerica should be adopted to other coffee regions worldwide. For its holistic approach, the book is a “must have” for all one, interested seriously in growing and processing high-quality coffee.