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Coffee processing methods and the reasons for adaptation: A study in Kandy District

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Coffee farmers follow different unit operations such as pounding (removal of pericarp), fermenting (allowing microbial action on sugary pulp around the seed), decaying (long duration microbial exposure to decay sugary pulp), washing (removal of pericarp and fermented products), hulling (removal of seed coat) and drying (drying of seeds) etc in processing berries. These unit operations are applied as a package in different sequence by coffee farmers. The objectives of the study were to identify coffee processing methods according to combined application of unit operations and to identify reasons for those applications in the Kandy District. Thalatuoya, Galaha, Doluwa, Udapalatha and Pasbagekorale are the main coffee growing Divisional Secretariat (DS) divisions in the District. Each DS division has approximately 200 ha of scattered coffee cultivations. Using the farmers' list maintained at the Department of Export Agriculture, 150 coffee farmers were selected randomly, 30 from each DS division. The respondents were asked to indicate unit operations in sequential manner when coffee processing was done and reasons for adopting them. Market prices were also examined for different coffee products made using combined unit operations. Five methods of coffee processing, following different unit operations in sequential manner were identified viz. drying, pounding and hulling (DPH); pounding, fermenting, washing and drying (PFWD); boiling, pounding, washing and drying (BPWD), decaying, pounding, drying and hulling (DPDH) and decaying, drying, pounding and hulling (DDPH). The adoption of DPH, PFWD, BPWD, DPDH and DDPH was 70%, 10%, 8%, 7%, and 5% respectively. Convenience, weather condition, labor scarcity, changes of coffee prices were the factors determining the adoption of processing method. Among the five methods identified, only PFWD (wet method) gave a quality product. All the coffee products were given a uniform price irrespective of the method of processing. It is important to determine coffee prices according to quality of final product and thereby adoption of processing methods that lead to inferior grades can be discouraged.

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