



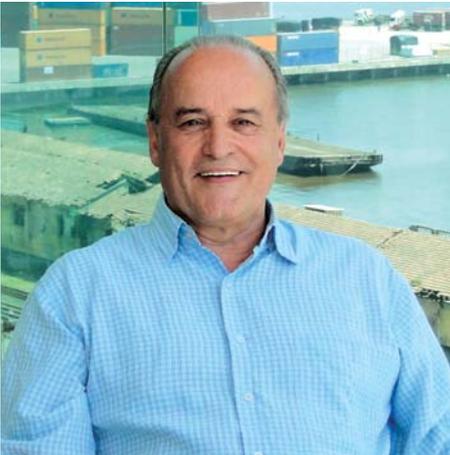
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INSIGHT SPECIAL: BRAZILIAN COFFEES

CBS&A Coffee Business Services & Academy, a Volcafe Initiative



Brazil is a huge producer of many unique coffees, leading to the export of a diverse range of coffee grades. In this Insight Special, we aim to clearly set out and decipher this array of grades – by region, process and export grade/cup. This is just one part of the Brazilian coffee story, and we hope to revisit our largest coffee origin again soon in the CBS&A series.

Urs Wegmann
General Manager,
Volcafe Ltda Santos



OVERVIEW

There's Latin America, and then there is Brazil. Not only does it have a different language, it has a different way of growing coffee, different ways of processing coffee, and a different way of grading coffee. With everything being on a larger scale in Brazil, in this report we will try to summarize the different geographical regions, the different Brazilian processes from cherry to green bean, plus the Brazilian-specific method of grading and cupping coffee, that culminates in the impressive range of coffees that are exported from our heavyweight coffee origin. ☪

HIGHLIGHTS

Brazil does coffee differently to the rest of the world. And because of the massive scale of the coffee culture within the country itself, the many regions, farmers, and exporters combine to produce a kaleidoscope of different coffees. Brazilian offer lists stretch right down the page, with a somewhat mystifying collection of regions, acronyms, numbers, and abbreviations kicking around. The first port of call to shed light on what makes each coffee on these lists unique, is the different Brazilian coffee areas. The next port is to have a look at the various Brazilian ways of processing the coffee cherry to green bean. The final clarification is to look at how Brazilians denominate their coffees through their grading and cupping system. ☪

BRAZILIAN COFFEE REGIONS

Almost 300,000 farmers in 1900 municipalities produce coffee in Brazil; it is not a niche business. These coffee towns spread out across the country, but the four main coffee states are Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, São Paulo, and Bahia, which together produce 90% of Brazilian coffee. There is a Brazilian shorthand for the type of coffee grown in each region; Group I coffee is the highest quality arabica with no rio cups, Group II is rio-cupping arabica which has an iodine taste (and which finds keen drinkers in Eastern Mediterranean countries, where the rio taste is prized), and Group III is conillon, or robusta to the rest of the world.

MINAS GERAIS:

This arabica-producing state supplies around half of all Brazilian coffee and almost 70% of all Brazilian arabica, in three distinct areas.

The **Sul de Minas** is a traditional coffee powerhouse, where generations of small coffee farmers have cultivated the rolling hills at an altitude of 700m to 1200m. Due to rising labour costs, mechanical harvesting is now very common here, along with the rest of the Brazilian coffee area where the topography allows it. Like the rest of Minas Gerais state, the main varieties of arabica grown here are Mundo Novo and Catuai, although several other arabica varieties can also be seen. The Sul de Minas is a strong producer of Group I sun-dried coffees. The strong presence of many cooperatives and exporters in the region means that the commercialization of Sul de Minas coffees is a smooth and reliable affair throughout the whole year.

The **Zona da Mata**, in the east of Minas Gerais, is a region with steep topography between 550m and 1200m, which means all harvesting and husbandry is done manually. Almost 50% of the coffee area here belongs to small farms below 10 hectares, compared to a 30% level in the Sul de Minas. Traditionally, because of a moist harvest climate, the Zona da Mata has been the biggest supplier of Group II coffee. However, recently the region has been making large strides to



improve the volume of Group I arabica, and now some very high quality sun-dried and washed coffees are coming to the market from here, made even more interesting by the diverse range of microclimates.

The **Cerrado**, the flat highlands in the west of Minas Gerais, sits at an altitude of 850m to 1250m. It is the newest area in Minas Gerais, with the coffee culture 'only' four decades old. It is a region of large, mechanized farms; less than 10% of coffee farmland belongs to farms below 10 hectares. The Cerrado has become a touchstone in terms of production techniques and quality know-how. The region is recognized as an extremely reliable, high quality supplier of various fine coffees.

ESPIRITO SANTO

Brazil's second biggest coffee state produces almost 80% of the country's conillon (robusta), mostly in the centre-north. In the south, arabica is grown, and Espírito Santo farmers have developed

some very interesting washed arabicas on altitudes of up to 1200m.

SÃO PAULO

This is another traditional natural arabica producer, but one that has lost coffee area to sugarcane in recent decades. **Mogiana** is the most famous region, a good supplier of Group I fine natural coffees, along the lines of Sul de Minas, which borders it, to the east.

BAHIA

This state represents a newer type of coffee cultivation in Brazil, on altitudes of around 900m. The newest arabica area, the **Cerrado Baiano**, has a hot climate and a high level of irrigation to accommodate this. Cost of production is extremely high but this is compensated by high productivity. **Planalto** is an older area with cooler temperatures, higher altitudes and a production of very fine washed coffees on small specialized farms with fermentation tanks. Finally, South Bahia produces conillon on large highly technified farms. ☪



BRAZILIAN PROCESSES FROM CHERRY TO GREEN BEAN

Each region adds its flavor to Brazilian coffees through the different altitudes, climate, style of farming, varieties, and soils etc. But once the cherries are harvested, there are several ways of processing them to green bean. We are concentrating on arabica terminology from now on, as Brazilian arabica accounts for 90% of green coffee beans exported from the country.

NATURAL PROCESS

This is the process Brazil is famous for, and most of its arabica is dried in this way. Brazil's long dry winter harvests are the perfect climate for it. Coffee cherries are laid out in the sun on patios until the cherry turns hard and black. Later the blackened husk is then cracked off in hulling machines, leaving the green bean with some silverskin. Natural arabica is characterized by high sweetness, a clean cup and full body, and low acidity.

SEMI-WASHED

This method has been present in Brazil for decades. It is adopted by producers across Minas Gerais, sometimes just to speed up the drying process, but also to improve quality in humid regions such as the Zona da Mata, or simply to take advantage of the premium these coffees fetch. The cherry skin is removed by machine, either leaving the mucilage on the bean to dry, to later be hulled, or then rubbing off the mucilage by another machine. Semi-washed coffees are characterized by sweetness, delicate acidity but light body.

FULLY-WASHED

Most of this coffee is produced in Bahia. The cherries are pulped, fermented, washed again to remove all mucilage, then dried. Bahian fully-washed coffees are sweet and acidic, with good premiums to match. Most Brazilian washed coffees are exported in the months soon after harvest, while natural arabica is exported year-round. ☪



BRAZILIAN EXPORT GRADING SYSTEM

Brazil has its own classification system for grading coffee.

On the internal market, Brazilian coffees are classified according to the Classificacao Oficial Brasileira, which ascribes a number to a coffee lot, depending on the number of defects in a 300g sample. The lower the number, the less defects, and the better quality. So, for example, Type 2 coffee is better than Type 4. As is usual across the coffee world, the aspect, shape and colour of the beans in the sample are also considered.

Brazilian coffee is then further classified according to the cup. The regional origin will have given the coffee particular acidity (or lack of), body and flavours. Furthermore, the process used from cherry to green bean will add its own stamp to the coffee taste.

Group I natural arabicas are labeled either fine cup or good cup, with the former being soft ('mole'), sweet, clean and even, and latter being hard ('duro') in the cup and perhaps more uneven.

Group II natural arabicas can be described as one of the following; 'riado' (sometimes translated as rioy) which means a slight iodine taste, and 'rio', a stronger iodine/medicinal taste.

For the export market, there are some standard types on any Brazilian offer list, for example: **'NY 2/3 mtgb strictly soft fine cup'** which would be sun-dried arabica, type 2/3 according to the Green Coffee Association of New York's allowance of defects (slightly different to the COB), mtgb or 'medium-to-good-bean' ie of screen 14/16 size, mild and sweet-cupping, with fine cup clean and even taste.

Consumers of Brazilian coffees are blessed with an extremely efficient coffee supply chain, which reliably ships green coffee all year round, according

to the needs and wants of those who roast it. The above outline of Brazilian regions, processes and grades is just part of the picture. Many clients will have their own longstanding vocabulary which they share with their exporters, to specify the exact type of Brazilian coffee they require. One thing we can be sure of is that Brazil will continue to ship the good value and good quality coffee it has always supplied in volume with pride, but that also the unique and diverse coffees from the many branches of Brazilian coffee production will also find more fame and appreciation for their inimitable flavours, as we go forward. ☕



Volcafe's master blenders: Antonio Ribeiro (left) and Gabriel Barbara (right)

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