Book Review

Coffee: growing, processing, sustainable production—a guidebook for growers, processors, traders, and researchers
Jean Nicolas Wintgens (Ed)
Wiley-VCH Verlag, Weinheim, 2004
976 pp, €299, ISBN 3-527-30731-1

Coffee is still one of the most important trade goods worldwide, and production has increased enormously over the past few years. This increasing production, however, has been detrimental to coffee quality, and the price paid for green coffee has fallen dramatically. These effects show that coffee is a very sensitive raw material, and it is necessary to provide growers, processors and traders with the latest knowledge on coffee breeding, growing and processing.

In the last few years several instructive textbooks have been published, which help readers understand many aspects of coffee production better than before. Important books in this regard are those of Flavent and Thomas (2001), which deals with the chemistry of coffee flavour, and of Clarke and Vitzthum (2001), which updates the chemistry, technology, physiology, health aspects, agronomy and legal aspects of coffee. The proceedings of the Coffee Colloquia, which are organised by the Association Scientifique Internationale du Café, are also good sources for updating knowledge on coffee.

In total, 44 authors contributed to this book, which has been edited by Jean Nicolas Wintgens, and the editor has gathered the best authors in their respective fields to cover all aspects of coffee production.

To my knowledge, this book is the best for updating one’s knowledge of coffee production, especially if one is interested in the botany, breeding, diseases, harvesting, storage and processing of coffee. The book gives, however, few or no answers to questions of coffee chemistry and flavour, which are important aspects of the field, particularly when the needs of consumers are taken into account.

Almost half of the book is devoted to growing, where the term ‘growing’ includes many aspects such as botany, genetics, breeding, propagation, biotechnology, organic coffee, fertilizers and, especially, sustainable coffee production. This part shows that this book is not only a textbook but indeed a handbook. The illustrations and the tables fit, in most cases, very well to the text, and a list of publications rounds off the individual chapters. The bibliography, however, is a weak point in some chapters because it is too short and some important, especially newer, publications are not included. For instance, in part I, chapter 4, with only 10 citations, the latest from 1998, publications from the past six years have not been cited. In contrast, in chapter 5, 65 publications published up to 2002 have been cited. This comparison shows that the quality of the chapters is not always comparable, an observation which is, perhaps, not that surprising.

Part II deals with pests and diseases: all important diseases caused by animals, microorganisms or viruses are described in a total of 8 chapters. The description includes the most effective methods of avoiding or combating these diseases.

During the past few years, new harvesting and processing techniques have been developed. Part III describes, in a comprehensive manner within the space of three chapters, the up-to-date techniques which are widely used throughout the world. Further chapters deal with storage, shipment and quality aspects of coffee, as well as factors responsible for quality losses. Part V, which deals with economics, is a shorter part comprising only 50 pages and, in my opinion, is not the strongest part of the book. Part VI, however, in which the most important data and facts on coffee are collected, is very helpful and a good source for comprehensive information on all questions concerning coffee.

Overall, the book is indeed an encyclopaedia on coffee, especially if one is interested in the botany, breeding, (sustainable) processing and diseases. Its format and presentation are excellent, and it can be recommended to all who are interested in the production of coffee. The price of the book is, however, high, so that the circulation may be limited.

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