New Zealand Grown Coffee - an emerging speciality crop

Questions

1. What specific environmental conditions and biological traits allow coffee plants (*Coffea*) to be successfully grown as a crop in Northland, and how does New Zealand's subtropical climate affect fruit development compared to traditional tropical origins?

2. Why is maintaining New Zealand's biosecurity status critical for the future of coffee production, and what challenges exist regarding plant genetics for future crop development?

3. Why is New Zealand focusing on specialty coffee rather than competing in the global commodity coffee market, and what strategies can growers use to maximise economic return from this organism?

4. What selective management practices and post-harvest interventions are required to turn harvested coffee cherries into a high-value specialty product?

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NEW ZEALAND-GROWN COFFEE – AN EMERGING SPECIALTY CROP

A small group of pioneering growers are testing whether New Zealand can establish a commercially viable specialty coffee industry, with Northland currently at the centre of the emerging sector. The opportunity is not to compete with the world's coffee giants on volume, but to develop a rare, premium product built around quality, provenance, innovation and New Zealand's distinctive growing environment.

Justine Stuart : NZ Coffee Producers Association

Coffee may seem an unlikely crop for New Zealand, but a small number of growers are demonstrating that it can be grown successfully in the country's frost-free northern microclimates.

Recognising that coffee is a new commercial proposition for New Zealand, the NZ Coffee Producers Association (NZCPA) was established in 2024 to bring growers, researchers and industry partners together and help establish the foundations for a viable specialty coffee industry.

Traditionally coffee is grown in tropical regions like Brazil, Colombia, Viet Nam and Ethiopia, supplying a global market estimated in 2026 to be worth US$265 billion. However, these regions are facing increasing pressure from rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and coffee pests and diseases.



A new block of coffee growing in Waipapakauri in the Far North

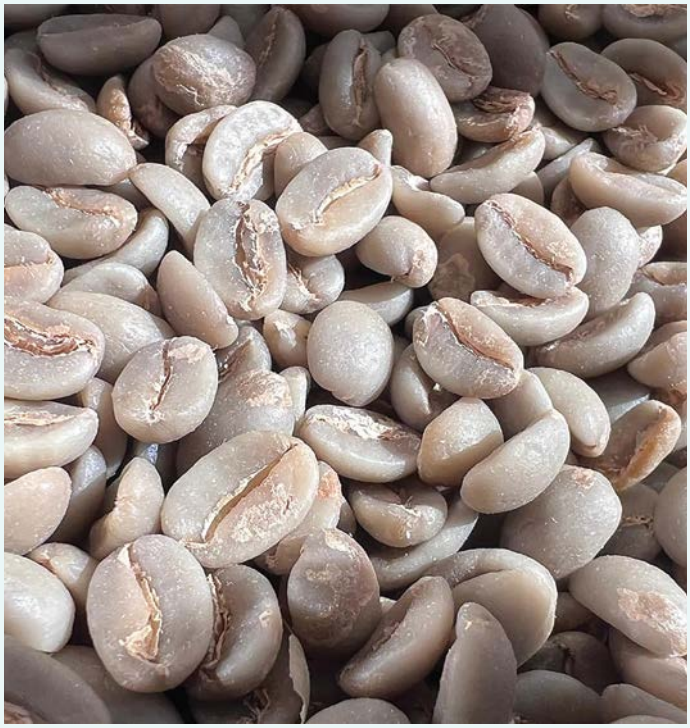
As a relatively high-cost economy, New Zealand could never compete with these origins on cost or volume. Instead, the opportunity is in specialty coffee, which can command significantly higher returns when it combines exceptional quality with traceability, rarity and a compelling story of origin. Specialty coffee is the fastest-growing segment representing an estimated 45 percent of the total market in 2026, with an annual value of approximately US$120 billion.

While the market is enormous, coffee production is dominated by smallholders, with most farms less than 5ha. Other non-traditional coffee growing locations, including California and New South Wales, have demonstrated the potential of cooler subtropical environments. A longer fruit-development period in these climates (coffee cherries can take 10–11 months to mature rather than the more typical 8–9 months) can result in greater sugar development contributing to distinctive flavour profiles.

Currently, New Zealand also has an important advantage, with no known coffee pests or diseases. Maintaining that status will be critical as the industry develops.

The fundamentals of growing coffee are relatively straightforward, but producing specialty coffee requires attention to detail





Coffee beans fresh from cherries (left) and green beans ready for roasting. Premium niche coffee commands prices of up to $600 per kg (and New Zealand growers are already selling at between $300–$400 per kg)

throughout production. Coffee prefers frost-free, sheltered sites, well-drained soils and moderate temperatures. First harvest can generally be expected within about three years, with plants reaching full production at around five years. Coffee also grows successfully alongside other crops such as avocados, bananas and citrus.

The harvest itself is labour intensive. Specialty coffee cherries are selectively handpicked at optimum ripeness, and what happens after picking is equally important. Processing removes the fruit surrounding the coffee bean and can involve different combinations of washing, drying and fermentation, all of which influence the final flavour and quality.

The specialty coffee market has been developing since the 1980s. There is a sophisticated evaluation system managed by the Specialty Coffee Association and used by experts and buyers worldwide to identify the distinctive attributes of each batch. When specialty coffee is grown and handpicked with care, processed to bring out its flavour, and presented with a defined story of origin, it can command premium pricing (typically NZ $100–$600+ per kg).

Developing local processing knowledge and infrastructure will be just as important as getting the agronomy right, from horticultural innovation and processing expertise to fermentation and flavour development.

Growers can choose how much of the value chain they want to own, from growing and processing green beans through to roasting, direct-to-consumer sales, agritourism, hospitality and by-product processing.

SPECIALTY COFFEE IS THE FASTEST-GROWING SEGMENT REPRESENTING AN ESTIMATED

45% **OF THE TOTAL MARKET IN 2026**

NZ Feijoa Growers Association Inc

2027 Commodity Levy Referendum

Thank you for voting on the NZ Feijoa Commodity Levy 2027. The referendum closed on 7 August 2026, with 91.3% grower votes in favour and a production value weighted support of 96.6% in favour. We really appreciate everyone who took the time to have their say. The information has now been collated and sent to the Minister, Hon. Todd McClay for his consideration.

Roger Matthews
President, NZ Feijoa Growers Association Inc

www.feijoa.org.nz



Coffee plant germination – accessing new plant genetics is a challenge for growers

New Zealand already has a sophisticated coffee culture and strong network of specialty roasters, providing an important connection to markets. These specialists understand discerning domestic consumers and are also connected to premium green-bean buyers, specialty competitions and auctions globally.

On-farm experiences and coffee tourism are also increasingly attractive, particularly because cool-climate coffee is unusual. For some producers, agritourism can generate valuable additional revenue while developing a premium product and building customer loyalty.

> **Coffee grows successfully alongside other crops such as avocados, bananas and citrus**

NZCPA has started mapping where coffee is growing in New Zealand. Although only a small number of growers are producing commercial harvests and achieving specialty quality, more than 10,000 plants are now growing from the Far North to as far south as the Bay of Plenty. The NZCPA approach is deliberately collaborative, with growers encouraged to share knowledge, test ideas and develop capability collectively while retaining ownership of their own businesses and brands.

In spring 2026, the association is planting crop trials on five Māori-owned land plots in Northland, funded through the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) Māori Agribusiness Extension Fund. The aim is to better understand where coffee grows well and to create a comprehensive handbook for New Zealand growers.

Interest is increasing, but plant material remains a challenge. A limited range of coffee varieties is currently available in New Zealand, and new material must be carefully managed to protect New Zealand's biosecurity status. NZCPA is working to safely access varieties that could offer good yield, quality and resilience in New Zealand conditions, while also working with MPI to review current plant import health requirements.

The association is working with growers and stakeholders on the issues that will determine how pioneering farms can develop into a sustainable commercial industry, with labour, processing capability and market development all in focus.

The NZCPA vision is for New Zealand-grown coffee to enter the global market as a premium product and establish a reputation as an exciting new origin. Unlike mainstream horticultural crops, where volume can be central to financial viability, specialty coffee could suit an artisanal approach, adding another distinctive product to New Zealand's premium food and beverage story.

Answers

1. What specific environmental conditions and biological traits allow coffee plants (*Coffea*) to be successfully grown as a crop in Northland, and how does New Zealand's subtropical climate affect fruit development compared to traditional tropical origins?
   Coffee plants prefer frost-free, sheltered sites with well-drained soils and moderate temperatures. In New Zealand, microclimates in regions like Northland provide these frost-free subtropical conditions. Additionally, the cooler subtropical climate extends the coffee cherry development period to 10–11 months (compared to 8–9 months in tropical regions like Brazil or Ethiopia). This extended maturation allows for greater sugar development within the fruit, contributing to distinctive flavour profiles.

2. Why is maintaining New Zealand's biosecurity status critical for the future of coffee production, and what challenges exist regarding plant genetics for future crop development?
   New Zealand currently has the distinct biosecurity advantage of having no known coffee pests or diseases. Protecting this pest- and disease-free status is vital as the industry grows. However, obtaining new plant genetics is a major challenge. Currently, only a limited range of coffee varieties is available in New Zealand. Accessing new plant varieties that offer improved yield, quality, and environmental resilience requires strict biosecurity management and safe import protocols regulated through the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI).

3. Why is New Zealand focusing on specialty coffee rather than competing in the global commodity coffee market, and what strategies can growers use to maximise economic return from this organism?
   As a high-cost economy, New Zealand cannot compete with traditional producers on volume or cost. Instead, the opportunity lies in the fast-growing specialty coffee market, which commands high returns based on quality, traceability, rarity, and origin story. Premium niche green coffee can fetch between NZ $100 and $600+ per kg (with New Zealand growers already achieving $300–$400 per kg). To maximise returns, growers can integrate value-chain options beyond selling green beans, including roasting, direct-to-consumer sales, processing by-products, agritourism/on-farm experiences, and intercropping with fruit crops like avocados, bananas, and citrus.

4. What selective management practices and post-harvest interventions are required to turn harvested coffee cherries into a high-value specialty product?
   Producing specialty coffee requires precise selective handpicking of coffee cherries at optimal ripeness, which is labour-intensive. After harvesting, post-harvest processing removes the fruit surrounding the seeds/beans. This step involves custom combinations of washing, drying, and controlled fermentation, all of which heavily influence the final flavour profile and quality score evaluated by standard Specialty Coffee Association metrics.