
Geographical Indications: It takes tens of years to become an overnight success

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Abstract

Behind every overnight success lies decades of hard work, says a Brazilian proverb. This is precisely what is happening with the few national Geographical Indications (GIs) achieving success in the country. In this paper, we show how behind the "overnight" success of Cerrado Mineiro coffee GI rests decades of laborious systematic research carried out by innovative institutions and entrepreneurial producers' investments, "details" many narratives forget to tell.

To understand how Cerrado became successful initially, we reviewed the literature about its trajectory between 1950 and 2000 and interviewed people who lived through this period. In this summary, we pinpoint some topics that will be described extensively in the final paper.

Until the 1960s, due to its dryness, the Cerrado Mineiro region was considered a marginal agricultural area. That conception began to change at the beginning of the 1970s when researchers from the São Paulo State University and others proposed that the issue with the area was primarily due to chemical factors with the soil. This and the technological innovation introduced by the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) transformed the Cerrado from sterile to fertile. Through its **Center for Agricultural Research of the Cerrado** (CPAC), Embrapa adapted crops like coffee to the region's challenging soil and climate through correction and irrigation.

The Japan-Brazil Cooperation Project for the Development of the Cerrado (**Prodecer**) also played an important role in coffee development **in the Cerrado** since the **1980s**. Its infrastructure, financing, and technology transfer efforts-focused mainly on soil correction and irrigation systems-also contributed to the region's significant expansion of coffee cultivation.

Another factor behind the success story is investors' contribution from southern Brazil, especially from the 1980s onwards. These investors, many of whom were already established coffee producers in the southern part of the country, brought experience, capital, and advanced agricultural techniques that helped transform the Cerrado. Producers from the south came from a market-oriented agricultural culture focused on exports and increasing productivity.

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In 1991, Cerrado Coffee won the "Ernesto Illy Award for Quality Coffee for Espresso" This award, given by Illycaffè, recognized the high quality of the coffee produced in the region on the international stage and played a significant role in the certification of the Cerrado Coffee Geographical Indication (GI) in 2005. This GI certification further strengthened the region's reputation and provided legal protection for the brand Café do Cerrado.

However, had it not been for all the effort that preceded it, the Cerrado Mineiro recognition as a GI would not have made it the coffee powerhouse it is today. Probably, it would not have been even possible. Today, the region represents 12% of Brazil's coffee production, with 4,500 certified coffee farms and exports to more than 50 countries, generating an estimated USD 1.5 billion annually. It is also recognized as a producer of specialty coffee, with 80+ points.

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