

Coffee Deforestation Initiatives Overview (February 2022)

Introduction

Coffee is imported into the EU from more than fifty countries and is a key contributor to the economic and social development of the coffee producing countries, which are exclusively located between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. Coffee is cultivated on 12.5 million coffee farms, the majority of which are smaller than 5 hectares and belong to smallholder farmers, meaning that 25 million families depend on coffee for a living. One quarter of these farms are managed by women, providing up to 70% of the labour in coffee production.

The leading principle of the sector's initiatives has been to improve the living conditions of local farmers and small producers, while minimising the impact of coffee production on the environment. The implementation of sustainable agricultural practices promotes strengthened resilience to natural disasters, better land management, and, at the same time, mitigates the effects of climate change.

Each year, about 8.8 million hectares of forest land are lost worldwide. One of the main drivers for deforestation is the conversion of forests into farmland. While it is recognised that coffee plays a relatively small role in global deforestation, coffee represents 7.01% of EU-driven deforestation according to the research paper¹ used for the efficiency analysis for the Regulation proposal for deforestation-free products.

Coffee is a shade-loving plant and is therefore traditionally grown under trees to provide the necessary degree of shade and allow for a more regulated temperature. In the last decade, there has been a stronger focus on the resurgence of shade coffee, driven not only by its lower environmental footprint, but also by the increasing demand for the quality spectrum of speciality coffee supply. Shade facilitates intercropping and the mixed cultivation of coffee alongside other crops (pepper, avocado, banana, coconut or vanilla) fosters better product quality and higher income for the producer. Intercropping also has positive effects on biodiversity as it attracts pollinators and helps mitigate land degradation.

More recently, sustainable agricultural methods have expanded to minimise the impact of coffee production on tropical deforestation and forest degradation. For instance, agroforestry, crop rotation, targeted input use, soil and water management have been contributing to halting forest cover depletion and delivering on aspects such as soil and water management.

Coffee initiatives

Models predict an increase of the global demand for coffee. At the same time, climate change is forecast to modify the landscape of coffee growing regions, potentially leading to a reduction by half of the global area suitable for coffee production by 2050². This would cause potential disruption of coffee supply or deforestation in suitable areas for coffee cultivation in higher altitudes. Consequently, the coffee sector is

¹ Pendrill F., Persson U. M., Kastner, T. 2020. Deforestation risk embodied in production and consumption of agricultural and forestry commodities 2005-2017 (Version 1.0) [Data set]. Zenodo. Available at <https://zenodo.org/record/4250532#.YGrNv0BuK1M>

² Bunn, C., Läderach, P., Ovalle Rivera, O. *et al.* 2015. A bitter cup: climate change profile of global production of Arabica and Robusta coffee. *Climatic Change* 129, 89–101. Available at <https://rdcu.be/cE9rh>

dedicated to playing a strategic and proactive role in preventing deforestation, and supports initiatives fostering sustainable development and protection of ecosystems and their services³.

Escalating agroforestry as well as crop diversification have been identified as key drivers for better land management and reforestation in coffee producing countries. Over the years, the coffee sector's efforts have been focused on these objectives through different private projects and industry-wide voluntary initiatives such as [Coffee & Climate](#) and the [Sustainable Coffee Challenge](#) (SCC). The latter references a list of different private initiatives that have their key focus on SDG 15. It also includes a collective target of sustainably renovating and rehabilitating 1 billion coffee trees to increase farmers' yields and avoid the expansion of coffee's spatial footprint while meeting future growing demand for coffee. Other initiatives, such as [World Coffee Research](#), make use of breeding techniques to increase crop resilience to pest diseases and their stress tolerance to natural shocks, while ensuring cup quality and enhancing farmers' productivity.

The past years have also seen a continuous evolution of processes, tools and technology across the different Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) with the most prevalent being in the green coffee sustainability certification programs with special emphasis on the environment such as [4C](#) or [Rainforest Alliance](#). These programs allow for segregated traceability of coffee lots back to an identified Farmer Group, which has been independently checked under statistically-relevant and risk-adjusted processes for the absence of deforestation prior to a specific cut-off date specified in the programs' standard.

The [Coffee Public-Private Task Force](#) of the International Coffee Organization also plays a crucial role in building synergies and consensus in the coffee sector. It has brought together a range of actors from public sector representatives of ICO Member countries (including the EU), private sector companies and supporting organisations to implement the "London Declaration". This wide-ranging pledge aims at improving the living conditions of coffee producers and at promoting competitive and sustainable production and sourcing practices.

The European Coffee Federation (ECF) and its members believe that any EU initiative on deforestation and forest degradation should promote an adequate framework that encompasses collaboration with all relevant stakeholders and supports existing commitments, initiatives and best practices. Through research and development, capacity building and knowledge sharing, these initiatives truly make a difference for the natural environment, the empowerment of local communities and the wellbeing of farmers.

It goes without mentioning that ECF and its members remain open and willing to continue to engage with policy makers and civil society in view of achieving a sustainable coffee supply chain from bean to cup.

The European Coffee Federation (ECF) is the representative organisation for the European coffee trade and industry, speaking for over 700 companies ranging from SMEs to internationally operating companies, representing approximately 35% of the world coffee trade volume. ECF offers its members a forum for exchange, identifying industry-wide issues of common interest in the areas of food safety, sustainability and international trade.

³ Efforts have already been made to improve sustainability along the coffee supply chain, and coffee companies in the private sector have engaged in different initiatives and efforts on the ground to improve farming practices and prevent deforestation, as illustrated in the overview of the coffee sustainability landscape compiled by ECF. This catalogue is available at <https://www.ecf-coffee.org/category/sustainability/>.