

Entering the European market for certified coffee

Last updated:

11 August 2021

Certification is an increasingly common market access requirement in both mainstream and niche markets in Europe. Rainforest Alliance and 4C have a wide presence in the European coffee market, mainly in large-scale mainstream markets. At the same time, organic and fair trade are moving from niche to mainstream markets, and are especially popular in the mid-range coffee segments of several European markets. In the high and upper-end markets in Europe, organic certification is also growing steadily. As an exporter, you can use different channels to bring your certified coffee to the European market; this will depend heavily on the product quality and volumes available, and the type of certification that you hold.

Contents of this page

1. [What requirements must certified coffee comply with to be allowed on the European market?](#)
2. [Through what channels can you get certified coffee onto the European market?](#)
3. [What competition do you face on the European certified coffee market?](#)

1. What requirements must certified coffee comply with to be allowed on the European market?

You can only export coffee to Europe if you comply with strict European Union requirements. For a complete overview of these standards refer to our study on [buyer requirements for coffee](#) or consult the specific requirements for coffee on the European Commission website of [Access2Markets](#). This section highlights the main requirements related specifically to certified coffee.

Rainforest Alliance/UTZ certification

[Rainforest Alliance](#) has a wide presence in the European coffee market, reaching large-scale mainstream markets. In June 2020, the Rainforest Alliance has published its [new certification program](#) for farmers and companies. Audits based on this new standard will begin from July 2021. You can consult the [guide for farmers on how to get Rainforest Alliance certified here](#). If you are an exporting company, refer to this [guide on how to get chain of custody certification](#). Rainforest Alliance uses the [Sustainable Agriculture Network \(SAN\)](#) standard to evaluate farms.

As of July 2020, Rainforest Alliance offers [mutual recognition options](#) for coffee. This means that companies at the end of the supply chain will be able to source UTZ and/or Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee and then use either the Rainforest Alliance or the UTZ label on their product.

4C

4C certification also has an important market share in Europe. 4C Compliant Coffee is coffee that has been produced in accordance with the 4C Code of Conduct, a set of baseline sustainable practices and principles for the production of green coffee beans. Compliance can be demonstrated through the 4C Certification System and the 4C Certificates that are subsequently issued.

In 2020, 4C presented its revised standard system. The system applied new audit risk assessment procedures

and a strengthened compliance and integrity programme. Access the 4C website to see all details about the [4C Certification process](#) and learn how you can [obtain a 4C Certificate](#).

Organic certification

In order to market your coffee as organic on the European market, it must comply with [the regulations of the European Union for organic production and labelling](#). Obtaining the [EU organic](#) label is the minimum legislative requirement for marketing organic coffee in the European Union.

Note that a new EU organic regulations came into force on 1 January 2021. Producers in third countries will now have to comply with the same set of rules as those producing in the EU. Also, inspections of organic production and organic products have become stricter to prevent fraud.

Before you can market your coffee as organic, an accredited certifier must audit your growing and/or processing facilities. Refer to [this list of recognised control bodies and control authorities](#) issued by the EU to ensure that you always work with an accredited certifier. To become organic certified, you can expect a yearly inspection and audit, which aims to ensure that you comply with the rules on organic production.

Note that all organic products imported into the EU must have the appropriate electronic [Certificate of Inspection](#) (COI). These COIs must be issued by control authorities prior to the departure of a shipment. This requires you to get the necessary information, such as the importer address and TRACES number, first consignee, and seal and vessel number of your container. If this is not done, your product cannot be sold as organic in the European Union and will be sold as a conventional product. COIs can be completed by using the European Commission's electronic [Trade Control and Expert System](#) (TRACES), where you will also have to register as an organic exporter.

If you want to export to countries outside of the European Union (EU), check the relevant legislation in that country. For instance, Switzerland has its own [Swiss Organic Law](#) and the [Organic Products Regulations 2009](#) apply in the United Kingdom.

In addition to the EU organic logo, most European countries also have their own voluntary organic standards and labels. Examples are [Bio-Siegel](#) (Germany), [AB mark](#) (France) and the [Ø logo](#) (Denmark). Some countries also have private standards or labels, for instance [Naturland](#) (Germany), [Soil Association](#) (United Kingdom), [Bio Suisse](#) (Switzerland), and [KRAV](#) (Sweden).

When exporting organic coffee, make sure to label your coffee batches with the name of the control body and the certification number. Your control body could review and approve your label. Labels of coffee beans should be written in English.

Fair trade certification

[Fairtrade International \(FLO\)](#) is the leading standard-setting organisation for fair trade certification. Note that [Fairtrade has introduced new requirements for certification](#) on 1 June 2020. This will require coffee cooperatives and traders to have commitments in place for new Fairtrade sales volumes, which must be confirmed by the end buyer and validated by the respective national Fairtrade organisation. In addition, Fairtrade is working on a [revised Coffee Standard](#), which is expected to be made public mid-2021. [FLOCERT](#) is the accredited certifier for Fairtrade. Refer to this [full guidance to learn more on how to become a Fairtrade producer](#).

[Fair for Life](#) (by IMO/Ecocert) and [Fair Choice](#) (by Control Union) are other fair trade certifications available to producers and other operators. Although less recognised on the European market, Fair for Life and Fair Choice have the advantage that the control bodies [Ecocert](#) and [Control Union](#) can combine the fair trade audit with, for instance, organic or Rainforest Alliance audits. However, always check demand and interest for a specific certification with your (potential) buyer.

Another fair trade standard used on the European market is the [Small Producers' Symbol \(SPP\)](#). SPP is a specific fair trade standard with community-based sustainability principles. Find the [certification steps for coffee producers](#) here. The [World Fair Trade Organization \(WFTO\)](#) is another fair trade standard, which recognises entire organisations that fully comply with fair trade practices.

Just as with organic coffee, label your fair trade-certified coffee batches with the name of the control body and the certification number.

Company-specific sustainability programs

The most common corporate sustainability programmes of private companies include [Nespresso's AAA Program](#) and [Starbuck's C.A.F.E. Practices](#). Check their websites and/or consult your buyers to check their latest requirements.

Other certification schemes

There are multiple certification standards that focus on biodiversity including Demeter and SMBC Bird Friendly.

- Demeter, a biodynamic certification label; refer to [their page to read about certification guidelines](#).
- SMBC Bird Friendly certification; read [here how coffee farmers can join this certification scheme](#).

Tips:

For the full buyer requirements, read [our study on buyer requirements for coffee in Europe](#).

Refer to the [International Trade Centre Standards Map](#) to learn about different certification schemes.

Find out which standards or certifications are preferred by potential buyers in your target segment. Buyers may have preferences for a certain sustainability label depending on their end clients and/or distribution channels.

Try to combine audits, if you have more than one certification, to save time and money. Also investigate the possibilities for group certification with other producers and exporters in your region.

Use this [cost calculator](#) to estimate what costs will be involved for your organisation to get Fairtrade-certified.

Familiarise yourself with the range of organisations and initiatives that offer technical support to help you convert to organic farming. Start your search at the organic movement in your own country and ask if they have their own support programs or know about existing initiatives. Refer to the database of [affiliates of IFOAM Organics](#) to search for organic organisations in your country.

Learn more about organic farming and organic guidelines on the [European Union website](#) and the [Organic Export Info website](#).

Try to visit trade fairs for organic products, like [Biofach](#) in Germany. Check out their website for a list of exhibitors, seminars and other events at this trade fair. Here you will also find booths of the organic certification bodies.

Observe the labelling requirements for certified coffee. The bulk packaging label should contain the name/code of the inspection body and certification number. This will ensure that the bags containing certified coffee have their identity preserved throughout the supply chain.

2. Through what channels can you get certified coffee onto the European market?

The European market for certified coffee can be segmented by quality. Certified coffee is used in both the mainstream and the specialty coffee markets. Specialty coffee represents a growing niche market in Europe, following demand for higher-quality coffees. In the specialty segment, certification and labels are generally less common, with the exception of organic certification. The largest volumes of certified coffee mainly enter the European market through importers or medium-sized and large roasters.

How is the end market segmented?

The European market for certified coffee can be segmented by quality, as shown in the figure below:

Figure 1: Coffee end market segmentation by quality



Source: ProFound

Low end: Rainforest Alliance/UTZ-certified coffee is most often used in the lower-end segment. Coffees in the low-end segment are mainstream, low-quality and mainly blended coffees. These blends are characterised by high shares of Robusta beans. Besides some mainstream brands, also the lower-quality private label products from supermarkets belong to the low-end segment. In addition, most coffee pads and instant coffee belong to this low-end segment. Coffees in the low end of the market are mainly sold in supermarkets and through service channels, such as offices and universities.

Certified product and price examples in the low-end segment, in 2021, include:

| | Product | | Retail price (€/kg) |
|---------|--|--|---------------------|
| Low end | Perla , private label (Whole beans, UTZ-certified, 1-kilogram package) | | 9.29 |
| | Melitta (Whole beans, Rainforest Alliance-certified, 1-kilogram package) | | 12.99 |

Mid range: The mid-range segment represents a stable coffee market, in which sustainability certifications are important. Fairtrade and/or organic certification have become mainstream in the mid-range coffee segments of several European markets.

Mid-range coffees are commercial coffees with a good and consistent quality profile, such as quality espresso. This segment typically consists of blends with a higher proportion of Arabica compared to the low-end segment. In general, certification, storytelling, and the origin of the coffee beans have become increasingly important, mainly for marketing purposes.

Mid-range coffees are often sold in supermarkets and by the food service industry. Premium private label ranges of retailers typically belong to the mid-range segment. These products offer the same quality and characteristics as branded products but are usually offered at more competitive prices. Examples of mid-range products and prices include:

| | Product | | Retail price (€/kg) |
|-----------|---|---|---------------------|
| Mid-range | Perla , private label (Whole bean, Robusta & Arabica blend, UTZ & organic-certified, 500-gram package) | ✘ | 14.38 |
| | Ethiquable (Whole bean, 100% Arabica, single-origin Peru, SPP & organic-certified, 1-kilogram package) | ✘ | 14.50 |
| | Fairtrade Original (Whole bean, 100% Arabica, single-origin Colombia, Fairtrade & organic-certified, 500-gram package) | ✘ | 17.78 |

High and upper ends: Sustainability certifications are less common in the high and upper-end segment because sustainability practices are often commonplace among buyers. Long-term contracts between suppliers and buyers characterise the high and upper-end segment, as well as higher prices. Also, buyer and supplier usually agree on projects for communities and distribution of money to farmers, a common characteristic of certifications aimed at social impact.

But high and upper-end segments do see a growth in organic-certified coffees. The primary focus of organic certification is consumer safety and environmental accountability. Organic farming and certification is regulated by legislation, and it addresses aspects which are complementary to high quality, such as the prohibition of synthetic inputs.

High-quality coffee mainly consists of washed Arabicas. These coffees are often single origin and coffees with a special story. The upper end of this segment consists of specialty coffees of excellent quality, often from micro or nano lots that go through innovative processing such as naturals and honeys. These are mainly fully traceable and single origin Arabica beans with a cupping score of 85 and above. The high and upper-end segments are a small but growing market in Europe.

Certified coffees from this segment are mainly sold directly by specialty roasters, at their physical and web shops as well as at coffee events. Examples of coffee festivals are those held in [Berlin](#), [London](#), [Amsterdam](#), [Milan](#), [Warsaw](#), [Barcelona](#) and [Paris](#). To find examples of European specialty roasters and cafés, refer to the city guides on the [European Coffee Trip](#) website. There are also several coffee web shops in Europe, where you can find high and upper-end coffees, including [Roast Market](#) (Germany) and [Specialty Coffee](#) and [Dutch Coffee Dealer](#) (Netherlands).

Examples of certified coffees in the high and upper-end market segments include:

| | Product | | Retail price (€/kg) |
|--|---------|--|---------------------|
|--|---------|--|---------------------|

| | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|-------|
| High and upper ends | <i>Variety:</i> Bourbon, Caturra <i>Process:</i> Washed <i>Origin:</i> Nicaragua, Esteli, Las Diosas <i>Roaster:</i> Elephant Beans (Germany) <i>Certification:</i> Organic <i>Package size:</i> 250-grams | ✘ | 33.20 |
| | <i>Variety:</i> Kurume, Welicho (Heirloom) <i>Process:</i> Washed <i>Origin:</i> Ethiopia, Guji, Sidamo, Suke Quto <i>Roaster:</i> Bocca (Netherlands) <i>Certification:</i> Organic <i>Package size:</i> 250-grams | ✘ | 35.00 |
| | <i>Variety:</i> Yellow Catuai <i>Process:</i> Pulped natural <i>Origin:</i> Brazil, Ondas da Mantiqueira <i>Roaster:</i> Lomi (France) <i>Certification:</i> Organic <i>Package size:</i> 250-grams | ✘ | 47.60 |

Premium prices for certified coffee: In general, export prices of green coffee beans, and the share kept by coffee producers, will depend on the bean quality, the size of the lot and the supplier's relationship with the buyer. The largest shares are kept by coffee roasters and retailers. In the mainstream coffee market about **10%** of added value goes to farmers.

Although sustainability certification does not always affect the retail prices of coffee, most of the schemes offer a premium to producers and exporters. Premiums may differ per country, producer and buyer due to various aspects, such as quality, proportion of in-kind premium and negotiation powers.

- Rainforest Alliance: **Rainforest Alliance certification does not guarantee a minimum price for certified coffee.** However, the new 2020 Certification Program requires buyers to pay a Sustainability Differential, a mandatory additional cash payment to certified farms over and above the market price. This payment is designed to be completely free of restrictions or requirements on how it is used.
- Fairtrade: **Mandatory minimum price** which distinguishes between Arabica and Robusta coffee, between conventional and organic, and between natural and washed, plus a Fairtrade premium.
- Organic: Usually a margin of 15-30% over the baseline prices paid for organic-certified green coffee beans.
- Combined Fairtrade and organic: for both organic and Fairtrade-certified green coffee, a buyer pays the **Fairtrade Minimum Price** (or the C-market price, whichever is higher), and on top of that a Fairtrade premium and a fixed organic differential. This means that the Fairtrade minimum price is a guaranteed minimum price, in case the C-market price drops to lower levels. Note that the Fairtrade Minimum Price is the *minimum* price, meaning that farmers and exporters may sell at higher prices when market conditions allow.

Value distribution: In general, end market prices for coffee vary depending on the targeted market segment. Green coffee export prices typically amount to only 5% to 25% of the end market prices, depending on the coffee quality, the size of the lot and the supplier's relationship with the buyer.

Prices for specialty coffee may have a reference on the international London and New York market prices but will command differentials. In the specialty segment, the shares of added value for farmers tend to be much higher than in the mainstream coffee market.

The Specialty Coffee Association provides an illustrative example of how exporters should look into their [value chain, in terms of different costs and margins](#). Also, refer to the [Specialty Coffee Transaction Guide](#) to get an idea of current market prices for specialty coffee. This guide quantifies anonymous contract and pricing data of importers and roasters, based on quality, quantity, and origin of purchased coffee.

Tips:

Refer to our study on [trends in the coffee sector](#) to learn more about developments within different market segments.

Price premiums for certified green coffee may vary widely, depending on quality and certification scheme. If you move towards certified coffee production, make a thorough [cost calculation](#) to calculate the possible extra profit. Do the calculation with and without the certification expenses, learning costs, workload and possible differences in yields. Note that, in the beginning, you may not sell a lot of certified coffee; sales likely evolve over time as you increase your portfolio of certified buyers.

Always make sure you provide the quality required by buyers and comply with standards correctly.

Check the website of the [Specialty Coffee Association \(SCA\)](#) to learn more about the high-end coffee segment, market trends and main players.

Through what channels does sustainable coffee reach the end market?

As an exporter, you can use different channels to bring your certified coffee onto the European market. In general, certified coffee enters Europe through similar market channels as conventional coffee. The way of entering the market will vary according to the quality of your coffee and your supplying capacity. Bear in mind that shortened supply chains are a general trend in Europe, especially in certified and ethical channels. This means that retailers and coffee roasting companies are increasingly sourcing their green coffee directly from producing countries.

The market channels for certified green coffee are characterised by chain of custody protocols. Chain of custody certification is applicable to all companies in the supply chain that own and handle the product and make sustainable certified claims about the product. These protocols provide evidence that the product originates from well-managed, certified sources, and verifies that it has not been mixed with products from uncertified sources at any point in the supply chain, except under strict management controls.

The below figure shows the most important market entry channels for your certified green coffee beans in Europe.

Figure 2: Market channels for certified green coffee in Europe



Importers

Importers play a vital role in the coffee market, functioning as supply chain managers. They maintain wide portfolios from various origins, pre-finance operations, perform quality control, manage price fluctuations and establish contact between producers and end buyers, such as roasters. In most cases, importers have long-standing relationships with their suppliers and customers. In general, importers either sell the green beans to roasting companies in Europe or re-export them to other European buyers.

Large-scale importers usually have minimum quantity requirements starting at around 10 containers, covering a wide range of qualities, varieties, and certifications. At the same time, they provide strong support regarding logistics, marketing, and financial operations.

Examples of large-scale importers in Europe dealing with certified coffees are [Neumann Kaffee Gruppe](#), [Louis Dreyfus Company](#) and [Olam Group](#). These supply coffee to large roasters and mainstream retailers in Europe.

Specialised importers are able to buy small and mid-sized volumes of high-quality and single origin coffees, from microlots to full container loads (FCL). Examples include [Mercanta The Coffee Hunters](#) and [DR Wakefield](#) (United Kingdom), [Touton Specialties Coffee](#) and [Rehm & Co](#) (Germany), [Nordic Approach](#) (Norway), [Belco](#) (France), [Sucafina Specialty](#) (Belgium), [Trabocca](#) and [This Side Up](#) (the Netherlands). Coffees from these importers end up partly in mainstream retail, organic retail and specialty shops.

There are also specialised brands that import directly and are focused on fair trade and organic-certified products. Examples are [Alter Eco](#) (France), [Simon Lévelt](#) (the Netherlands), [Gepa](#) and [Rapunzel](#) (Germany).

For whom is this an interesting entry channel? The most interesting channel for you will depend on the quality of your coffee and your supply capacity in terms of volume. If you are an exporter of certified green coffee beans and you can offer high volumes (10 containers or more), you should look into entering the European market through large importing companies. These companies usually have agents or representative offices in producing countries, which can be your first point of contact. These companies tend to require UTZ/Rainforest Alliance or 4C as a minimum standard.

Specialised traders may be interesting if you have evidence of high cupping scores of at least 80 or higher, although some buyers may require scores higher than 85, plus high transparency and traceability. Specialised traders may also have a special interest in coffees with sustainability certification, such as organic or fair trade. Keep in mind that many specialised importers prefer to work directly with producers or cooperatives.

Large-scale and medium-sized roasters

Most large roasters buy their own coffee beans at the country of origin, although they might also source through importers. Roasters usually perform analysis and cup testing to check the evenness of the roast and to identify any defects that can occur in post-harvest processes, such as fermentation, drying and storage. Large roasters usually blend different qualities of green coffees to safeguard quality consistency. The final product is distributed to retailers and the food service industry.

Roasters can operate under their own brands and/or private label. All large roasters will manage coffees with a variety of certification standards. Examples of large-scale roasters active on the European market include [Jacobs Douwe Egberts](#), [Nestlé](#) and [Lavazza](#).

Examples of medium-sized roasters focused on specialty coffees in Europe are [Cafe Direct](#) and [Union Hand-Roasted Coffee](#) (United Kingdom) and [Arvid Nordquist](#) and [Löfbergs](#) (Sweden). Examples of private label roasters include [Lincoln & York](#) (United Kingdom), [Pelican Rouge Coffee Roasters](#) (the Netherlands) and [Beyers](#) (Belgium). Private label roasters may roast for mainstream clients as well as for specialty brands.

For whom is this an interesting entry channel? Supplying directly to large-scale roasters is only interesting if you are able to supply large volumes at consistent quality. If you work with bulk coffees, discuss minimum quality and certification requirements with your potential buyer. The most common certifications among buyers operating in bulk markets will be Rainforest Alliance and 4C.

Supplying to medium-sized roasters which focus on specialty coffee is interesting if you have steady volumes of higher and consistent-quality coffees, and if you are willing to engage in long-term partnerships. Many medium-sized roasters may also require one or more certifications such as Rainforest Alliance, organic and fair trade.

Small-scale roasters

Although there is a growing number of small roasters which import green coffee directly from origin, the largest share of smaller roasters continues to buy their coffee via importers. Few small roasters can take on the additional responsibilities and operational capacities needed to import directly from origin. Importers help roasters with financial services, quality control and logistics. Nevertheless, small roasters often maintain a direct connection with their producers, as they need detailed information for storytelling to market the coffee to their clients (brands or consumers).

Small roasters are often specialised in single origins and the finest specialty coffees. Many of them deal with organic-certified coffees as well. Examples of small roasters in Europe include: [Bocca](#) (Netherlands), [Coffee Collective](#) (Denmark), [Caffenation](#) (Belgium) and [Flying Roasters](#) (Germany). There are many small-scale coffee roasters in Europe; for more examples, refer to the website of the [European Coffee Trip](#).

For whom is this an interesting entry channel? Supplying to small roasters is interesting for producers and exporters that have high-quality coffees, micro lots, can guarantee traceability, adhere to specific sustainability standards, and who are willing to engage in long-term partnerships. If you have very high-quality coffees and are currently working through an importer, for example, it would be interesting to explore direct trade possibilities to see whether you could connect directly with roasters. This requires you to have the financial means and technical know-how to organise export activities.

The most common type of certification required by small-scale roasters, and increasingly so, is organic certification. Other certifications are much less common among these buyers. Be aware that many smaller roasters may not be importers, but that it is nevertheless important to interest them in your coffee. A logistic partner (importer) can then be found to ship your coffee to destination.

Intermediaries/agents

Agents act as intermediaries between you, coffee importers and roasters. These are actors with vast market knowledge and can help you assess and select interesting buyers. Some agents are independent, while others are hired to make purchases on behalf of a company. Examples of agents in Europe include [Eugen Atté](#) and [Euroca](#) (Germany) and [Marex Spectron](#) (the United Kingdom). Before engaging with agents, make sure they have the certification standard license which enable them to deal with specific certified coffees.

For whom is this an interesting entry channel? If you have limited experience exporting to European countries, agents can play a very important role. Agents are also interesting if you have limited quantities of coffee or if you lack financial and logistical resources to carry out trade activities. Working with an agent is also useful if you need a trusted and reputable partner within the coffee sector. Be prepared to pay an extra commission for their work.

Tips:

Invest in long-term relationships. Whether you are working through importers or roasters, it is important to establish strategic and sustainable relationships with them. This will help you manage market risks, improve the quality of your product and reach a fair quality-price balance.

Find buyers that match your business philosophy and export capacities in terms of quality, volume and certifications. For more tips on finding the right buyer for you, see our study on [finding buyers in Europe](#).

Find importers that specialise in organic products on the [website Organic-bio](#).

If you produce coffee according to a fair trade scheme, find a specialised European buyer that is familiar with sustainable or fair trade products, for instance via the [FLOCERT customer database](#).

See our study on [how to do business with European buyers](#) for more information about complying with

buyer requirements, how to send samples and how to draw up contracts.

Attend trade fairs and other events to meet potential European buyers. Interesting events include SCA's [World of Coffee](#) (every year in a different European city), [Biofach](#) (organic, Germany) and [COTECA](#) (Germany). Attending such physical or virtual fairs can provide you with additional insight into the preferences of European buyers with regard to origin, flavour and sustainability certification.

See our study on [buyer requirements for coffee](#) to learn about which European market standards and requirements you need to comply with when supplying to Europe.

3. What competition do you face on the European certified coffee market?

In general, the degree of competition on the market for certified mainstream coffee with low added value is high. This segment is mainly dominated by major suppliers and cooperatives which are able to deliver large quantities so they can compete on price. It is difficult for small and medium-sized companies, for example those exporting a few containers per year, to compete in this segment.

In the specialty coffee market volumes are smaller, and the focus is more on quality, origin and sustainability. However, as demanded volumes are smaller, and more and more producers focus on this segment, competition can also be quite high.

New entrants to the market will face competition from already successful coffee exporters, especially due to their already established long-term relationships with buyers. Entering the market as a newcomer requires you to have extensive knowledge of your product assortment, stable quality and volumes, and good communication skills to start building your own new relationships with buyers. In addition, the coffee market is relatively small with few buyers.

Production volumes and sales of coffee per certification standard

About [2.2 million hectares](#) were dedicated to certified coffee production in 2018, accounting for at least 21% of the global coffee area. The breakdown per certification scheme is as follows:

Rainforest Alliance/UTZ: In 2018/2019, approximately 9.7% of total global coffee production was Rainforest Alliance and/or UTZ certified. Given that buyers can still source UTZ and/or Rainforest Alliance coffee, and decide which label they put on the final product, data is provided for both labels:

In the 2018/2019 season, about 55% of the total UTZ-certified coffee production was sold as certified, amounting to [590,000 tonnes](#). About 85% of the volume sold consisted of the Arabica variety. Most sales came from Brazil, Vietnam, and Honduras.

That same year, about 59% of the Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee production was sold as such, amounting to [394,000 tonnes](#). About 94% of the Rainforest Alliance coffee sold was of the Arabica variety. The largest production volumes of Rainforest Alliance-certified coffees were reached in Brazil, Colombia and Ethiopia, while most sales came from Brazil, Colombia and Guatemala.

4C: Between 2009 and 2016, the 4C-certified coffee area increased steeply by [380%](#). However, because of the increase in the number of small producers compared to large producers it dropped by 27% between 2016 and 2018. By the end of 2020, 194 producing groups were 4C-certified, making up more than 300,000 coffee producers in twenty coffee-producing countries. About [52%](#) of 4C-certified produced coffee was Robusta in 2020, and 48% Arabica. With 81 producer groups, Vietnam houses most 4C-certified groups, followed by Brazil

with 19 producer groups, Colombia with 16 and Indonesia with 14.

Organic: In 2019, 709,000 hectares of global coffee production was grown organically: [6.7% of total production](#). Organic coffee imports by the EU in the same year reached [130,000 tonnes](#), 3.0% of total green coffee imports by the EU. Between 2018 and 2019, organic coffee imports increased by 12%.

Fairtrade: The global volume of [Fairtrade](#)-certified coffee reached [207,000 tonnes](#) in 2018. Between 2015 and 2018, sales volumes increased at an average annual rate of 5.0%. The largest suppliers of Fairtrade-certified coffee are Peru (26% of total sales in 2018), Honduras (17%) and Colombia (15%). An estimated 28% of the total Fairtrade-certified coffee production is sold under the label.

Brazil: the world's largest coffee producer also supplies large shares of certified coffees

Brazil is the world's largest coffee producer, with production volumes amounting to [3.63 million tonnes](#) between July 2019 and June 2020. Brazil produces both Arabica (75%) and Robusta (25%), but [about 80% of exports are Arabica](#). The largest shares of Brazilian certified coffees are destined for the mainstream market, and hold either UTZ or Rainforest Alliance labels.

In fact, Brazil is the largest supplier of UTZ-certified and Rainforest Alliance-certified coffees. About [42%](#) of global Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee sales was supplied by Brazil, amounting to 164,000 tonnes in 2019. Between 2018 and 2019, Brazilian Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee sales increased by 18%. In 2019, Brazil accounted for 33% of the global Rainforest Alliance production with 221,000 tonnes.

When it comes to UTZ-certified production, Brazil is also the largest producer. About 43% of global UTZ-certified coffee sales came from Brazil, with 256,000 tonnes in 2019. Between 2018 and 2019, UTZ-certified coffee sales by Brazil increased by 23%. Brazil supplied 50% of all UTZ-certified Arabica sales in the world in 2019. Brazil also accounted for 9% of global UTZ-certified Robusta sales that year. In 2019, Brazil accounted for 31% of global UTZ-certified coffee production with 337,000 tonnes.

Brazil's coffee-producing areas are relatively flat, which has [intensified the use of mechanical pickers in the industry](#). This has drastically reduced labour costs in Brazil's coffee production, but also resulted in lower quality, as machines do not distinguish between ripe and unripe cherries. Coffee prices in Brazil went down, especially in relation to other coffee-producing countries. Brazil mostly produces natural and pulped natural coffees. Low-grade Brazilian Arabica is mostly used in blends.

Although the country is mainly known for [exporting large volumes of standard quality](#), the country also has a strong reputation as a producer of specialty coffees. This is in part thanks to the [Brazil Specialty Coffee Association](#), which aims to elevate the quality standards and enhance value in the production and marketing of Brazilian coffees. Examples of successful exporters of specialty coffees in Brazil are [Burgeon](#) and [Bourbon Specialty Coffees](#). Large Brazilian exporter [Costa Café](#) has also started exporting specialty coffees in addition to its regular mainstream coffee exports.

Vietnam: the world's largest producer of 4C-certified coffee and UTZ-certified Robusta

Vietnam is the world's second-largest coffee producer, with production volumes reaching [1.878 million tonnes](#) between October 2019 and September 2020. Approximately 96% of Vietnamese coffee production consisted of Robusta coffees. In 2020, Vietnam was the largest producer of 4C-certified coffees in the world. Vietnam had [81 4C-certified producer groups](#), encompassing more than 91,000 certified coffee producers. Together they produced about 600,000 tonnes of 4C-certified coffee in 2020. To compare, Brazil was the second largest 4C producer with 4C production volumes reaching about 400,000 tonnes.

Vietnam was the second-largest UTZ-certified coffee producer in 2019. Vietnam accounted for [19%](#) of total UTZ-

certified coffee production, with 205,000 tonnes of UTZ-certified coffee produced. Vietnam accounted for 15% of global UTZ-sales, with 91,000 tonnes of coffee in 2019. Vietnam supplied 79% of total UTZ-certified Robusta coffee in the world, followed by Brazil (9%) and India (8%).

As climate change poses a serious threat to the Vietnamese coffee sector, the country is working hard to achieve greater coffee sustainability. In collaboration with many international actors, such as [Bioversity and CIAT](#) and [IDH](#), private and public actors in Vietnam increasingly focus on making coffee production in the country a sustainable practice and source of income for smallholder farmers.

In addition, to help boost the [European Union-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement](#) (EVFTA) implemented in 2020, the Vietnamese government requested the country's coffee industry players to [apply advanced cultivation, processing and storage technologies](#), to increasingly meet buyer requirements from European importers.

In general, Vietnam's coffee production is strongly focused on creating large volumes of standard quality coffees, mostly directed to the instant coffee market. In recent years, [Vietnam's Robusta exports have been faced by strong competition](#) from the Brazilian Conilon and Robusta beans from other countries. [Government efforts](#) have, in part, therefore been more and more directed towards improving the quality of coffee beans. As there is an increasing interest in high-quality coffees in consumer markets, [Vietnam's specialty coffee industry is slowly developing](#).

Peru: the largest supplier of organic coffee to Europe

Peru is the largest organic coffee supplier to the European Union, with 46,000 tonnes of organic coffee in 2019, [32%](#) of total EU organic imports. Between 2018 and 2019, organic coffee supplies from Peru to the EU increased by 15%.

Peru ranked as the world's second-largest organic coffee producer in 2019, only after Ethiopia. The organic coffee area in Peru reached [121,000](#) hectares, about 29% of the total area cultivated with coffee in the country. The production of organic coffees is actively promoted by [local government agencies and non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\)](#), which is done mainly as a strategy to increase farmers' income.

Although Colombia is the largest producer of Fairtrade-certified coffees, Peru registered the largest sales of Fairtrade-certified coffees in 2018. In 2018, Peru sold 54,000 tonnes of Fairtrade-certified coffees, of which 71% was also organic-certified.

The government of Peru has prioritised the international promotion of its coffees. Key focus areas of promotion are their unique origin, the sustainability of production and the high quality of coffees. Peru is regarded as the [fourth-largest producer of coffees with sustainability certification](#), including Rainforest Alliance/UTZ and Fairtrade. Promotion is done by the Peruvian export promotion agency [PromPeru](#). As part of the international promotion strategy, Peru recently introduced its own national coffee brand to the international market: [Cafés del Peru](#).

Colombia: large producer and supplier of certified coffees

Colombia is the world's third-largest coffee producer, with production volumes amounting to [846,000 tonnes](#) between October 2019 and September 2020. Colombia is an important producer of certified coffees worldwide: it is the second-largest producer of Rainforest Alliance-certified coffees, only after Brazil, and Colombia is the largest producer of Fairtrade-certified coffees.

Colombian sales of Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee reached over [70,000 tonnes](#) in 2019 – 18% of global Rainforest Alliance sales. Between 2018 and 2019, Colombian sales of Rainforest Alliance-certified coffees increased by 41%. Production volumes reached 110,000 tonnes in 2019, 16% more than in 2018.

Colombian production of both conventional and organic Fairtrade-certified coffee reached 259,000 tonnes in

2018. Between 2016 and 2018, Colombian production of Fairtrade-certified coffees increased on a year-to-year basis by 17%. In terms of Fairtrade sales, Colombia was the largest supplier of conventional Fairtrade-certified coffee with 24,000 tonnes in 2018. Organic and Fairtrade-certified sales accounted for 7,200 tonnes. Peru and Honduras both registered much higher double Fairtrade and organic-certified coffees, resulting in overall higher Fairtrade sales than Colombia.

The wide availability of certified coffees has allowed green coffee exporters in Colombia to access various markets and segments in Europe. Colombia is the world's largest producer of washed Arabica. The [Colombian Coffee Growers Federation](#) strategically promotes and markets Colombian coffee, solidifying the country's established image and brand for high-quality coffees. The Café de Colombia trademark is a [registered protected geographical indication \(PGI\)](#) in Europe, which is unique among coffee producing countries.

Honduras: large supplier of Fairtrade and organic-certified coffees

Honduras is the world's sixth-largest coffee producer at [324,000 tonnes](#) of Arabica coffee between October 2019 and September 2020. The Honduran Coffee Institute [IHCAFE](#) has been promoting the production of value-added coffees, either through certification or by actively improving coffee quality. The country has grouped [coffee production and quality specifications into six different regions](#) according to differences in microclimates and soil composition. Honduran exports of specialty organic coffees increased by [30%](#) between 2016 and 2017 because of these efforts.

In addition to the growing reputation as a high-quality coffee supplier, a relatively large share of Honduras' coffee supplies is organic. In 2019, about [24,000](#) hectares in Honduras were dedicated to organic coffee farming, approximately 5.4% of the total coffee area. This relatively low share underlines the existing growth potential of Honduras as an organic producer. But accounting for 26% of European organic coffee imports in 2019 ([37,000 tonnes](#)), Honduras was already the second-largest supplier of organic coffees to the EU, only after Peru.

Honduras is also a relatively large supplier of Fairtrade and organic-certified coffees. In 2018, sales reached over 35,000 tonnes of organic and Fairtrade-certified coffee. Because of the large share of double certification, Honduras ranked as the second-largest seller of Fairtrade coffee in the world, only after Peru.

Ethiopia: large producer of organic and Rainforest Alliance-certified coffees

Ethiopia is the fifth-largest coffee producer in the world, with Arabica production volumes amounting to [447,000 tonnes](#) between October 2019 and September 2020. Ethiopia is the world's largest organic coffee producer with [160,000](#) hectares of organic coffee area in 2019, over 23% of the country's total coffee production area.

Ethiopia was the third-largest producer of Rainforest Alliance-certified coffees in 2019. In the same year, Ethiopia produced about 8% of global Rainforest Alliance-certified coffees, amounting to 51,000 tonnes. Between 2018 and 2019, Ethiopia registered a large 87% increase of Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee production, with several new certificate holders joining the program due to more favourable policies in the country. Global Rainforest Alliance sales from Ethiopia reached 4,300 tonnes in 2019, only a small share of production.

[The Ethiopian government highly encourages the sector to adopt more sustainable growing techniques](#) and to focus on producing high-quality Arabicas. Ethiopian producers rely on the uniqueness of Ethiopia as an origin, as it is considered by many to be the birthplace of coffee. Ethiopia's coffees have high potential in the specialty market.

Almost all coffee in Ethiopia is traded on the [Ethiopian Commodities Exchange \(ECX\)](#). However, since 2017 exporters are allowed to sell directly to international buyers, due to recurring issues related [to the lack of traceability of farm-specific or organic-certified coffees sold through ECX](#). The [enactment of the Coffee sector reform in 2018/19 has addressed traceability and other main challenges facing the sector](#), such as improved services by ECX and strengthened research and development to breed high-producing coffee varieties.

Identifying your potential competitors

To be successful as an exporter, it is important to learn from your potential competitors. Focus on their marketing strategies, the product characteristics they highlight, and their value addition approaches. You can learn from, for instance, companies or cooperatives like [Red Ecolsierra](#) (Colombia), [Comsa](#) (Honduras), [Cenfrocafe](#) (Peru), [Ankole Coffee Producers Cooperative Union](#) (ACPCU, Uganda), [Rwashoscco](#) (Rwanda) and [Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union](#) (OCFCU, Ethiopia). These are all examples of companies that have certification highlighted on their website, and market their products in an interesting and appealing manner.

Learn from these companies how to promote your portfolio of certifications and sustainability practices. Give detailed information about your coffee growing region (origin), the varieties, qualities, processing techniques and certification of the coffee you offer. You can also tell about the history of your organisation, your coffee growing farm(s), and about the passion and dedication of the people working there. These are all elements that make your company unique.

Tips:

Work together with other coffee producers and exporters in your region when you lack company size or certified product volume. Together you can promote good-quality certified coffee from your region and be a more attractive and more competitive supplier for the European market.

See our [tips on doing business with European coffee](#) buyers for more information.

Develop long-term partnerships with your buyer. This implies always complying with buyer requirements and keeping your promises. This will provide you with a competitive advantage, more knowledge and stability on the European market.

Actively promote your company on your website and at trade fairs. Quality competitions also provide good opportunities to share your coffee with a wider audience. For instance, refer to the auctions organised by the [Cup of Excellence](#).

Are you interested in exporting high-quality coffee? Learn more about cupping scores on [the website of the Specialty Coffee Association](#) (SCA). You can also consider getting a [Q Arabica or Q Robusta Grader certificate](#) to be able to cup and score your coffee through smell and taste according to international standards.

ProFound – Advisers In Development carried out this study on behalf of CBI.

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).