

wherefrom

The Sustainability of the Coffee Industry: Consumer Perception



wherefrom

About wherefrom

Wherefrom is an online platform that connects sustainably-minded brands with sustainably-minded consumers. Conscious consumers can rate the sustainability of the products they buy through our opinion-based scoring system. We help brands across the UK improve their sustainability strategies by providing them with valuable insights, direct communications with consumers and access to relevant experts in our partner network.

We are driven by our passion to shift the dial forward in sustainability.

Our mission and vision

To give consumers a voice and help lead brands towards environmentally and socially conscious practices. We envisage a world in which all businesses are continuously improving in line with consumer demands and transparently reporting on their progress.

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Introduction

Coffee is a highly consumed commodity with a variety of environmental and social impacts. As such, wherefrom's users and general consumers have a responsibility to understand the coffee industry's challenges and scope for sustainability across the value chain. Although it can be argued that the quality of coffee is important for consumers, they tend to be removed from the whole coffee production process and are not always aware of how their coffee was grown nor by who. By valuing coffee in social, environmental and economic terms, they can support sustainable production.

In light of the need for engaged and connected consumers, this report outlines the impacts of the coffee industry, how wherefrom users perceive the sustainability of coffee brands, as well as the areas of sustainability they would most like to see addressed.



The coffee industry's impacts at a glance

Environmental

Coffee production has been contributing to climate change as demand for coffee has risen. Historically, coffee was grown using the [shade-grown cultivation method](#), whereby coffee was grown under trees and amongst other plant species. Shade-grown farms provide, [over the long-term](#), better bird habitats, soil protection and erosion control, carbon sequestration, natural pest control and pollination.

However, in order to maximise production and yields, some plantations have been deforesting large land areas to increase the sun exposure of their crops. Out of the 50 countries with the highest deforestation rates, [37 of these are major coffee producers](#). Increased deforestation leads to a decrease in biodiversity. Finally, coffee plantations require a lot of water; to grow enough beans for a standard cup [140 litres of water](#) are required.



Social

Globally, **125 million people** rely on coffee to maintain their livelihoods. However, their livelihoods are very much impacted by the **highly volatile coffee market**. On average, farmers in developing countries (where most coffee comes from due to their tropical climate) only receive **10% of the retail price of coffee**. Competition between all of these growers has led to reductions in price meaning that producers whose crops are impacted by bad weather have no financial safety net. Without unions, coffee cooperatives, or fair trade agreements, these farmers can be left without guaranteed prices for their production costs. In relation to this, it's important to understand that it takes between **3 to 4 years for newly planted coffee trees to bear fruit**.

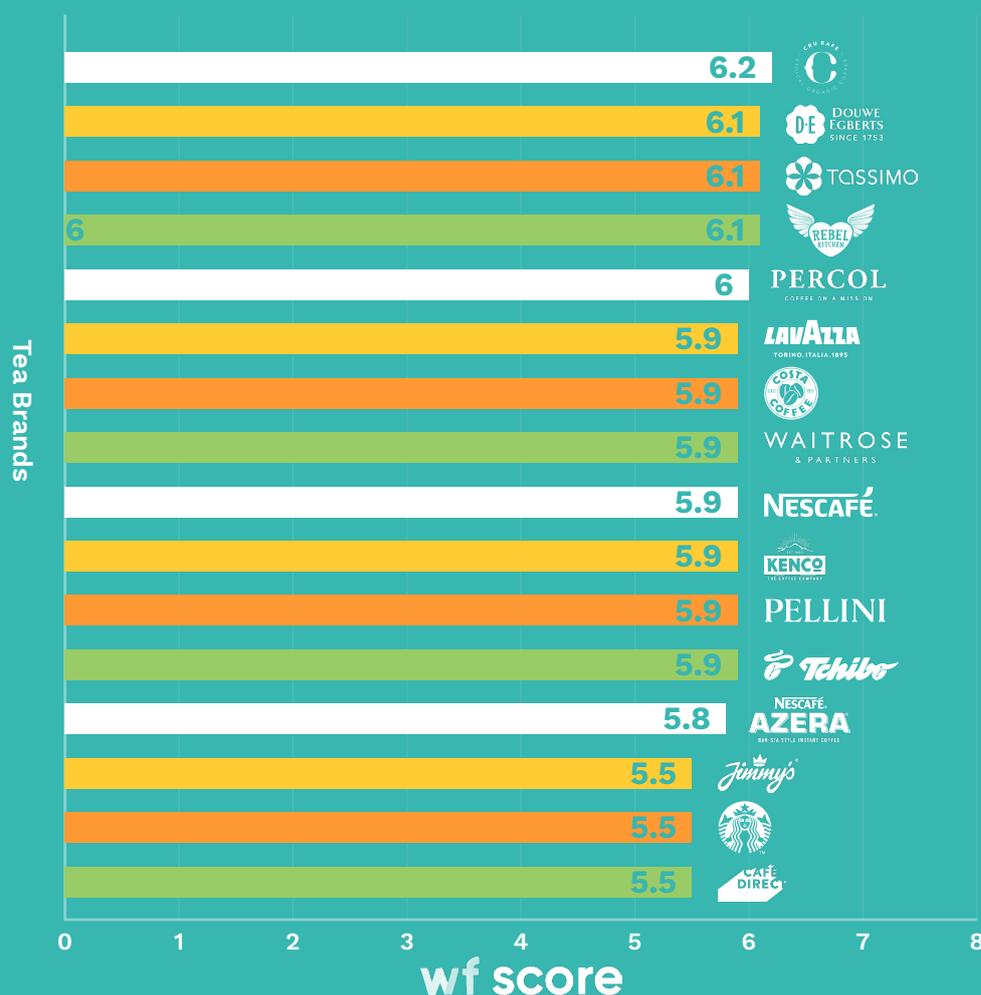
There's also a problem with gender in coffee production. The Rainforest Alliance has stated that **60-90% of coffee labourers are female** and these women have far less access to resources than their male counterparts. It has been estimated that if the gender gap in coffee is closed, **women could increase yields by 20-30%** which could produce an **extra 30 billion cups of coffee annually**.

Finally, **child labour** is also a problem in coffee production. Reports say that child cherry pickers on plantations are ingrained in the coffee industry. This is problematic for their health and safety, and it also maintains a cycle of poverty as children are less likely to obtain an education.

Coffee sustainability as perceived by wherefrom users

Considering the myriad of problems associated with the coffee industry, as illustrated above, coffee products score on average a 5.9 on wherefrom. This is not a particularly low score, however coffee products score lower than their tea counterparts, which have an average score of 6.1 on wherefrom. The gap between the highest and lowest scoring coffee brands is just under 1 point.

Highest & lowest scoring brands*



Highest scoring coffee brands



Background Information

➤ Location: London, UK

Performance



Highest rated product:
Cru Kafe Fairtrade
Organic Honduran
Whole Bean Coffee
250g (6.3)

Certifications and Memberships



Certified Soil
Association
Organic



Certified
Fairtrade

Highest scoring coffee brands



**DOUWE
EGBERTS**
SINCE 1753



Background Information

- Location: Berkshire, UK
- Owned by Jacobs Douwe Egberts, which is based in the Netherlands

Performance



Highest rated product:
Douwe Egberts Pure
Gold Medium Roast
Instant Coffee 400g
(6.1)

Certifications and Memberships



UTZ Certified

Highest scoring coffee brands



Background Information

- Location: Berkshire, UK
- Owned by Jacobs Douwe Egberts, which is based in the Netherlands

Performance



Highest rated product:
Tassimo Costa Latte
Coffee Pods
8 Servings (6)

Lowest scoring coffee brands



Background Information

- Location: Edinburgh, Scotland

Performance



Highest rated product:
Cafédirect Fairtrade
Organic Machu
Picchu Peru Coffee
227g

- 61% of users thought that Cafédirect cares about the environment
- Users praised the brand for having clear recycling instructions for their packaging, with 49% of them stating the brand had clear recycling labelling

Certifications and Memberships



FAIRTRADE

100% Fairtrade



40% of coffee
is certified Soil
Association
Organic

Certified



Corporation

Certified B
Corporation

Lowest scoring coffee brands



5.5
out of 10

Background Information

- Location: Seattle, Washington

Performance



Highest rated product:

STARBUCKS by
NESPRESSO House Blend
Lungo Coffee Pods, 10
Capsules, 57g

- 100% of users believed Starbucks does not care about the environment
- 100% of users believed that Starbucks does not publish information about its environmental impact

Certifications and Memberships



Founding member of the
Coffee And Farmer Equity
[\(C.A.F.E.\)](#) practices standard

Lowest scoring coffee brands



Background Information

- Location: Dorset, UK

Performance



Highest rated product:
Jimmy's Iced Coffee
Original 330ml (5.9)

- 100% of users did not know if Jimmy's Iced Coffee publishes information on their environmental impact

Certifications and Memberships



Rainforest
Alliance
certified

Sustainability performance of the coffee industry as a whole

The following results include all of the individual reviews of coffee products by wherefrom users. These outline whether users think coffee products are sustainable, including their packaging and sourcing of ingredients, as well as whether they are deemed healthy.

How sustainable do you think this product is?



Most consumers could not determine how sustainable the products were overall.

What do you think about the sustainability of this product's packaging?



The perception of coffee packaging is tied between a simple "okay" and a high "perfect".



How much do you trust that the ingredients in this product have been sustainably sourced?



Consumers tended to trust that ingredients were sustainably sourced.

How healthy do you think this product is?



Half of the consumers considered coffee products healthy.

Needs and expectations: Room for improvement

There are various areas in which coffee products can improve their sustainability impacts and their wherefrom scores. The data we have collected through our platform indicates the issues that are the most important to consumers, and that coffee brands should focus on addressing.

The most important issue to them was the **recyclability, reusability and compostability of packaging**. The **safeguarding of human rights in supply chains** came in at a close second. The **responsible sourcing of ingredients** was identified as the third most important issue. Last but not least, **transparent environmental impact reporting** was also identified as an opportunity for positive growth.



*Accurate at the time of publishing.

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