

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

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To enter the European coffee market, there are both legal and non-legal requirements you must meet as an exporter. These mainly relate to food safety. Furthermore, European coffee buyers increasingly have additional requirements that you need to comply with to target specific segments or to keep up with European market developments. These are especially common when it comes to basic or extra food safety certification and sustainability standards. Lastly, complying with specific niche requirements related to higher sustainability and/or quality standards may increase your chances on markets that command higher values and lower volumes, if your product is suitable for them.

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1. What are mandatory requirements?

In this document you can find the most important legal and non-legal requirements you must meet when you want to market coffee in Europe. These include general requirements for food products, especially on food safety, as well as specific legislation for coffee. The [Access2Markets webpage of the European Commission](#) gives a complete overview of legal and other requirements on the European coffee market. The Product Code for coffee (green and roasted, including decaffeinated) is 0901. Make sure to use this code when looking up coffee-specific requirements on the Access2Markets webpage.

Food safety

When it comes to food products such as coffee, the main focus of European Union's legislation is food safety and food hygiene. The [General Food Law](#) is the legislative framework for this subject. This law ensures the quality of food products throughout the whole supply chain. Products that are not considered safe will be denied access to the European Union.

In the event of repeated non-compliance of specific products originating from particular countries, such as a health certificate or analytical test report, stricter conditions are required for import. Products from countries that have shown repeated non-compliance are put on a list included in the Annex of European [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2019/1793](#). The list of products and countries subjected is updated regularly. It is important to keep up-to-date on developments despite the limited nature of the increased checks for coffee.

Tips:

Make sure your products comply with [General Food Law](#) ([Regulation \(EC\) 178/2002](#)) and the [general rules on Food Hygiene](#) ([Regulation \(EU\) 2017/625](#)).

Check the [European Commission's guidance document](#) for information on certain key questions related to import requirements and the European rules on food hygiene and official food controls.

Read more about [health control and consumer protection](#) on the European Commission's Access2Markets webpage.

Refer to the [EU's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed \(RASFF\) database](#) to see examples of withdrawals of coffee from the market and the reasons behind these withdrawals. Under 'Product', choose the category 'cacao and cacao preparations, coffee and tea'. In addition, you can choose your country under 'Country' to see examples of non-compliances. This can be a basis for your own risk management system and to avoid future notifications or border rejections.

Expect buyers to ask you about your harvesting and processing protocols. Make sure you have this information available. Examples of questions you can expect are: where you dry your coffee, how you avoid foreign materials and if you have a system in place to control fermentation. For more information, read this publication to understand what [coffee trader Trabocca does to comply with food safety regulations](#).

Food contaminants

Food contamination can occur at different stages of the production process due to environmental elements, cultivation practices, processing methods or transportation. Since many contaminants are naturally occurring, it would be impossible to impose a total ban on them. European Union legislation ensures that contaminants are kept at levels that are as low as possible so that they do not threaten human health or negatively impact the quality of food. The levels are set based on scientific advice provided by the [European Food Safety Authority \(EFSA\)](#).

The main contaminants likely to be found in coffee products are:

1. Pesticides
2. Mycotoxins / mould
3. Pathogens
4. Extraction solvents
5. Hydrocarbons
6. Other: Acrylamide

Tips:

You must comply with the [regulation on contaminants in foodstuffs](#) (Regulation EC 1881/2006); otherwise your products will not be allowed into the European market. Suppliers to Europe are responsible for ensuring that imported foodstuffs comply with European legislation.

Focus on applying good agricultural practices to reduce the presence of food contaminants, as the risk of contamination of any kind can be prevented by better growing, drying, processing and storage practices. Information on [good agricultural practices in coffee production](#) can, amongst other, be found on the website of the World Coffee Research.

For information on safe storage and transport of coffee, refer to the website of the [Transport Information Service](#).

Read this article on Perfect Daily Grind to better understand [how green coffee can become contaminated](#).

A) Pesticides

The presence of pesticides is one of the most common reasons for border authorities to reject coffee coming from producing countries. The European Union has set maximum residue levels (MRLs) on the amount of pesticides allowed in food products, including coffee. The use of pesticides is permitted but should be strictly controlled to remain within the allowed limits. This is especially relevant for coffee farmers using pesticides to fight insect infestation such as the coffee berry borer. Be aware that products containing more pesticides than allowed by European regulations will be withdrawn from the European Union's market.

For organic coffee, MRLs of pesticides must be zero. Buyers will randomly select batches of organic green coffee, which they might send to accredited third-party laboratories to check for residues.

Recently, the use of glyphosate is placed under particular scrutiny. For decades, this was the most frequently used herbicide in the world. The current approval for the use of glyphosate in the European Union **expires on 15 December 2022**. Currently, a group of four countries (France, Hungary, the Netherlands and Sweden) is in the **process of applying for the renewal of approval** of glyphosate after 2022. Glyphosate is a controversial chemical substance used in numerous herbicides and has been under attack from politicians and environmentalists alike. The working group's risk assessment on glyphosate is **expected to come in mid-2023**.

In addition, the **Farm to Fork strategy** (part of the **European Green Deal**) aims to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. Among the most notable targets set by this EU strategy is a **50% reduction in the use of pesticides by 2030**. As part of this measure, the **EU has proposed legally-binding targets** for maximum residue levels and set strict new rules to enforce environmentally-friendly pest control.

Tips:

Check the legislation on **pesticide residues** (Regulation EC 396/2005) for further information on pesticides.

Consult the **EU pesticide database** for an overview of the maximum residue levels (MRLs) for each pesticide. You can search on your product or pesticide type. Always check with your buyers if they require additional adherence to MRL limits and pesticide use.

Focus on reducing the amount of pesticides in your products. A good way to do this is applying Integrated Pest Management (IPM), an agricultural pest control approach that uses complementary crop management strategies and practices to help minimise the use of pesticides. The **Crop Life's training materials** may be a useful source.

If in doubt or to avoid any doubt from your potential buyer, get your coffee analysed by a (preferably EU-accredited) laboratory to test for presence of MRLs. This should not cost more than a few hundred euros.

B) Mycotoxins / mould

Mould is another important reason for coffee border rejections. Ochratoxin A (OTA) levels, which are found on green coffee beans, are a specific point of attention. OTA contamination can be caused during production (picking of overripe cherries), post-harvest practices (bad fermentation) and during transportation in humid / leaky containers or storage in badly ventilated warehouses.

In 2022, the European Union set new limits for Ochratoxin A ([Regulation \(EU\) 2022/1370](#)). Although there is no specific limit for green coffee beans, [the maximum OTA level for roasted and ground coffee has been lowered to 3 µg/kg, and for instant coffee it is 5 µg/kg](#). In general, OTA levels drop during the roasting process, partly because different batches of green coffee are blended (each batch will contain different levels of OTA). Note that dark roasting may lower the level of OTA but that OTA [is not completely eliminated during the roasting process](#), so it is important to check the levels in green coffee.

Tips:

Focus on good agricultural, drying, processing and storage practices, for example by adopting Good Agricultural Practices and/or Good Manufacturing Practices. These steps have a significant influence on the development of mycotoxins.

Read and follow the *Codex Alimentarius'* [Code of Practice for the Prevention and Reduction of Ochratoxin A Contamination in Coffee](#) (CXC 69-2009).

If in doubt, get your coffee analysed by a (preferably EU-accredited) laboratory to test for presence of Mycotoxins. Laboratories such as [SGS](#), [Eurofins](#), and others accredited under ISO 17025 are recommended for this purpose.

Always test your green coffee for moisture content. The International Coffee Organization states that dried green coffee beans should have a [moisture content of 8 to 12.5%](#). Moisture levels of >12.5% increase the chances of OTA contamination. Buyers will reject green coffee with such high moisture levels.

C) Pathogens: salmonella

Salmonella is a form of microbiological contamination. It occurs occasionally as a result of incorrect harvesting and drying techniques. Coffee beans are considered low-risk commodities regarding salmonella contamination, since its eventual roasting is a “kill step” for any microorganisms present in the product. As such, no microbiological criteria for coffee have been set in the current European legislation. However, food safety authorities can withdraw imported food products from the market or prevent them from entering the European Union when microorganisms are found during controls.

Tips:

Check the [legislation regarding the microbiological criteria for foodstuffs](#) (Regulation EC 2073/2005) for further information on micro-organisms.

Use the *Codex Alimentarius'* [Principles and Guidelines for the Establishment and Application of Microbiological Criteria Related to Foods](#) as a guideline to avoid microbiological contamination.

D) Extraction solvents

Solvents can be used for decaffeination of coffee. There are maximum residue limits restrictions for the extraction solvents such as methyl acetate (20 mg/kg in the coffee), dichloromethane (2 mg/kg in the roasted coffee) and ethylmethylketone (20 mg/kg in the coffee).

Tip:

Refer to [European Union Directive 2009/32/EC](#) for more information about the restriction of extraction solvents.

E) Hydrocarbons: Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) and Mineral Oil Aromatic Hydrocarbons (MOAHs)

There is increasing concern in the European Union regarding other forms of contamination in coffee. Several of them are grouped as what are known as Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs), [which may result from drying \(of green coffee\) and roasting processes](#). Examples are Benzo(a)pyrene and Anthracene.

In the drying process specifically, contamination is commonly caused by the smoke emitted from the fuel in artificial driers. However, it might also be related to air pollution, for instance when drying at the roadside. [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 835/2011](#) defines specific PAH limits for specific foodstuffs; they do not yet include coffee beans, but observance and prevention of contamination is advised (see Recommendations).

Mineral Oil Aromatic Hydrocarbons (MOAHs) are mineral oils that might be carcinogenic. Officially there are no maximum levels established in Europe. Still, some countries have set guidelines, like [Germany](#). Green coffee can get contaminated with MOAHs during all stages of the supply chain; during the production and drying of green coffee next to busy roads, during processing due to the overuse of grease in machinery, as well as during packaging, storage, and transport.

Tips:

Make sure to communicate to your buyer that you dry your coffee in a clean and professional way, away from potential contaminants as fossil fuels, traffic, kitchens or open fires.

If in doubt, get your coffee analysed by a (preferably EU-accredited) laboratory to test for presence of PAHs. [Eurofins](#) and [Tüv](#) are examples of EU-accredited laboratories.

Refer to the paper [Effect of mild roasting on Arabica and Robusta coffee beans contamination with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons \(2018\)](#) to learn more about PAH contamination in coffee and what steps of the production cycle should be controlled for.

F) Other: Acrylamide

Recently, there has been a discussion in the European Union regarding the levels of acrylamide in roasted coffee. [Acrylamide](#) is a carcinogenic substance that forms naturally when coffee is roasted at temperatures above 120°C. [Commission Regulation \(EU\) 2017/2158](#) establishes that the benchmark level for roasted coffee is 400 µg/kg. As an exporter of green coffee beans, you will not be directly affected by this legislative development, but it is important to note the increasing food safety controls for coffee in Europe.

Tip:

See [FoodDrink Europe's Acrylamide Toolbox \(2019\)](#) to learn more about this contaminant and its

occurrence in roasted coffee.

General requirements on packaging and labelling

There are specific industry practices for coffee labelling to ensure product identification and traceability. Labels of green coffee should be written in English and should include the following information:

- Product name
- [International Coffee Organization \(ICO\) identification code](#)
- Country of origin
- Grade
- Net weight in kilograms
- Supplier's name
- *For certified coffee*: name/code of the inspection body and certification number

Figure 1: Example of green coffee labelling



Source: Escoffee

Green coffee is traditionally shipped in woven bags made from natural fibres, such as jute or burlap. These bags typically hold 60 kilograms of green coffee. Although the 60 kg bag is the most common, some countries use bags holding 46 kg, 50 kg, 69 kg or 70 kg. However, jute and burlap bags do not protect against moisture. As such, plastic big bags and plastic container liners are increasingly used to lower this risk. These plastic bags range in size from 60 kilogrammes to full container-sized bags of 20 tonnes.

You also have high-barrier packaging (in all sizes, including container-size). This type of material keeps out both oxygen and moisture. Materials such as [Grainpro](#) or [Videplast](#) liners are often used to pack specialty coffees inside jute bags. The most exclusive specialty coffees are often vacuum-packed to preserve the green coffee quality.

Other packaging used to transport coffee includes polypropylene super sacks for 1 tonne of coffee, polyethylene liners for 21.6 tonnes and vacuum-packing. These techniques provide two advantages in the coffee trade, namely increased efficiency and preservation of quality.

Figure 2: Examples of coffee packing: jute bag, container-sized flexi bag, GrainPro and Videplast liner



Sources: raadtradingco.com, bls-bulk.com and GrainPro

Tips:

Refer to the non-product specific [labelling and packaging guidelines](#) for more information on rules which apply to all goods marketed in the European Union.

Always use food-grade quality packaging. Packaging materials can consist of fibres that have been softened by mineral oils or have been written on with mineral oil-based ink – these could lead to potential MOAH contamination of your green beans. Read more about [food-grade packaging](#) on this

blog by the Australian Food Authority, and read here how [Germany is planning to restrict the use of MOAHs in food contact materials](#).

2. What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Some buyers have requirements that go beyond existing legislation, in particular regarding food safety, quality, and environmental impact and social responsibility.

Additional food safety requirements

Note that, as the bulk of green coffee beans sourced in producing countries will still be roasted in the export destination, food safety management systems related to processing are not always required. However, some coffee buyers might require exporters to comply with a food safety management system, for example [ISO 9001](#) or [ISO 22000](#) or [hazard analysis and critical control points \(HACCP\) principles](#). HACCP is often a first step towards more rigorous food safety schemes, such as [FSSC22000](#) or [BRCGS](#). HACCP schemes can be developed with the aid of consultants specialised in implementing food management principles.

Another strategy to ensure food safety as a producer is to follow good agricultural practices. Buyers may require producers to meet the main standards of [GLOBALG.A.P.](#) They are standards for the certification of agricultural production processes that provide safe and traceable products. GLOBALG.A.P. has a special [Green Coffee standard](#), which covers production from pre-harvest activities such as soil management and plant protection product application to post-harvest handling and waste management.

In addition, exporters and producers may want to think about implementing [good manufacturing practices \(GMP\)](#). These general principles provide guidance on post-harvest processes such as washed or natural processing, manufacturing, testing and quality assurance to ensure that the product is safe for human consumption. At the least, your GMP plan should include guidelines for your processing facility and equipment as well as your warehouse and transportation.

Tips:

Carry out a HACCP scheme to reflect on critical points (potential hazards) in your supply chain that you need to control. Your scheme needs to be based on the [seven basic principles of the HACCP system](#). Read more about how to manage HACCP for coffee in the [Coffee Guide published by the International Trade Centre](#).

Familiarise yourself with food safety and Quality Management Systems (QMS). Read more on the different food safety management systems in the [International Trade Centre's Standards Map](#) by selecting *Identify* and then filtering by *Food Safety*.

Quality criteria

If you want to access the European coffee market, you will have to meet your buyer's quality standards - which are particularly high within the specialty segment. In general, coffee quality is judged based on both a physical evaluation of green and roasted coffee and a sensory evaluation of the roasted coffee.

Green coffee assessment

First, the quality of green coffee is graded and classified before export. There is no universal grading and classification system for coffee, but the Specialty Coffee Association's [standards for green coffee grading](#) are often used as a reference. However, most producing countries have and use their own [grading systems](#). The Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) also provides [specific standards](#) on coffee quality, such as [ISO 10470](#) (Green coffee - Defect reference chart).

Grading and classification is usually based on the following criteria:

- Altitude and region
- Botanical variety
- Processing method: wet/washed, dry/natural, honey, pulped naturals
- Screen size: important to ensure uniform roasting, which improves final product quality
- Classification of defects or imperfections
- Number of defects or imperfections
- Bean density
- Cup quality

European buyers typically do a green coffee assessment. This includes a screen-size evaluation, defect count and an assessment of bean colour, appearance and smell. This is followed by a moisture check and water activity analysis. Sample roasting is then done to evaluate green coffee quality and uniformity.

Sensory assessment: coffee cupping

Coffee is also assessed and scored by a method called cupping. Buyers use different protocols and standards to conduct a sensory assessment. However, the SCA recommends [specific guidelines and protocols for cupping coffee](#). The most widely used cupping tool is [the SCA's Coffee Taster's Flavor Wheel](#). Some of the quality attributes assessed are: flavour, fragrance/aroma, aftertaste, acidity, body, uniformity, balance, cleanliness, sweetness and off-notes. Overall ratings provide a summary assessment based on a scale of 50 to 100; the higher the score, the better the quality.

Note that there is no exact definition of specialty coffee within the coffee industry. The [Coffee Quality Institute](#) and the cupping protocols of the [Specialty Coffee Association](#) consider coffees graded and cupped with scores below 80 to be standard quality and not specialty. Nevertheless, the exact minimum scores defining specialty coffee differ per country and per buyer. Most buyers consider 80 too low and demand a cupping score of 85 or higher for it to be considered specialty.

If you sell specialty coffee, it is important for buyers to know the cupping score of your coffee. Although not mandatory, it is highly relevant to add this information to the documentation of the coffee you are exporting – this may add value to your product. Therefore, it is very important to be aware of the quality of your coffee, either through local cupping experts or by becoming a cupping expert yourself. Note, however, that your coffee will most likely be cupped again at the destination market by your buyer. Most coffee will be approved based on the cupping results of the pre-shipment sample.

Figure 3: SCA Coffee Taster's Flavor Wheel



Source: sca.coffee

Tips:

Read more about the quality requirements of the coffee industry at the website of the [Coffee Quality](#)

Institute and follow its recommendations on how to improve quality along the value chain.

Refer to Trabocca's article on **how to recognise and distinguish green coffee defects** for an overview of all coffee defects.

Learn more about coffee cupping and cupping scores on the website of the **Specialty Coffee Association**. Consider obtaining a **Q-grader certificate**, either for Q Arabica or Q Robusta, to be able to cup and score your coffee according to international standards of aroma and taste.

Promote the quality of your coffee. Start by giving an accurate description of the physical properties of the coffee, such as screen sizes, which and number of defects, at what altitude the coffee was grown, how the cherries have been processed, etc. Additionally, if possible, cup your coffee, give a rating and mention the cupping protocol of the rating.

Learn more about maintaining the quality of your coffee during transportation on the website of **the Transportation Information Service**.

Refer to this article on Perfect Daily Grind **to learn more about coffee density**.

Social responsibility

European buyers are increasingly addressing social and environmental issues in the coffee supply chain, and it is becoming common for them to develop corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies and codes of conduct that suppliers must follow. Sometimes they also become involved in local social and environmental projects.

Have a look at the websites of these small and mid-sized coffee importers for examples of sustainability codes of conducts and/or projects they have set up at origin:

- **GEPA** (Germany), **Ethiquable** (France) and **Altromercato** (Italy): these are all importers that work on the basis of fair trade principles.
- **This Side Up** (the Netherlands): specialty coffee importer that empowers farmers by helping them become fully independent agro-entrepreneurs.
- **Nordic Approach** (Norway): specialty coffee importer that focuses solely on sourcing traceable green coffees, they for instance work on the ground in origin to contribute to product development.
- **Efico** (Belgium): this coffee importer created the private **Efico Foundation**, which promotes sustainable coffee production through certification, training and education programs.

Examples of sustainability codes of conducts and/or projects from large importers and roasters are:

- Neumann Kaffee Gruppe: **Corporate Responsibility**. The group also founded the independent NGO **Hanns R. Neumann Stiftung**, with which it implements several coffee-based projects to promote a sustainable coffee economy.
- Lavazza: **Sustainability World**. The company founded the **Lavazza Foundation**, which implements sustainability projects to support coffee producing communities worldwide.
- Nestlé: **Sourcing coffee responsibly**, which they do through their own programmes Nescafé Plan and Nespresso AAA Sustainable Quality Program.
- Louis Dreyfus Company: **Sustainable Coffee**, which is focused on the expansion of certified/verified coffee and the implementation of projects at origins to support coffee farming communities.
- Starbucks: **Ethically Sourced Coffee**. Starbucks sources its coffee through its own developed sustainability standard, the C.A.F.E. Practices. The company also has six farmer support centres around the world, providing training to farmers.

Some examples of sustainability codes of conducts from retailers are:

- Ahold Delhaize (Netherlands/Belgium): Their [own brand complies with either Rainforest Alliance/UTZ or Fairtrade standards](#)
- Marks and Spencer (United Kingdom): [coffee products are all Fairtrade-certified](#)
- Lidl (Germany): [coffee products either Rainforest Alliance/UTZ, Fairtrade and/or organic certified](#)

These codes of conduct may also affect you as a supplier. They may, for instance, require you to sign a suppliers' code of conduct in which you declare that you do your business in a responsible way, meaning that you (and your suppliers) respect local environmental and labour laws, do not engage in corruption, etc. These aspects are also investigated further in company audits carried out by your (potential) buyer.

Besides the suppliers' code of conduct from various companies, it is important to be aware that the EU is implementing its so-called [European Green Deal](#). This Green Deal has the aim of making Europe sustainable and climate neutral by 2050. To achieve this goal, the EU is for instance working on [EU law that requires companies to address human rights and environmental standards within their value chains](#), including coffee. As with the corporate codes of conduct, companies will require you to comply with these additional requirements.

The EU also aims to introduce measures to tackle European and global biodiversity loss. Specific actions include the [EU Regulation on deforestation-free products](#), including coffee, for which the first legislative proposal was published in November 2021.

Tips:

Investigate the existing sustainability standards established by retailers and roasters by looking into the sustainable sourcing pages on their websites, or by approaching roasters, importers and sector specialists directly. Check whether you can adhere to the guidelines laid down by these standards. They can be a good starting point if you want to supply coffee to these companies.

Consider participating or visiting roundtable meetings (via conference call) or seminars to meet industry players and other interesting stakeholders. Check out the website of the [International Coffee Organization \(ICO\)](#) to keep up-to-date on these discussions.

Consider developing and implementing your own CSR policy or code of conduct. This is not always required by buyers but may be a good way to show potential buyers your views on social responsibility. Furthermore, this may help you to stand out when your buyer has to choose between several suppliers.

Ensure that your suppliers also have responsible business practices in place. Many social and environmental issues take place at farm level, which may not be a part of your direct (handling and processing) activities. To test to what extent your farmers are sustainable, you could ask them to fill out this [Excel form by the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative \(SAI\) Platform](#). You can also fill out [this online self-assessment form by Amfori BSCI](#) to assess your social performance.

Read CBI's article on ["The EU Green Deal - How will it impact my business?"](#) to find out more about this regulation and how to comply.

Sustainability certification

Certification is the most common way to show compliance with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) criteria. As such, many European companies, especially those in Northern and Western European countries, increasingly adhere to sustainability certification schemes. Various certifications focus on different issues and are popular in different countries or segments. Understanding the different certification standards is an important step towards accessing the EU market.

The major certification schemes in coffee are Fairtrade, organic, Rainforest Alliance/UTZ and 4C. Having at least a Rainforest Alliance/UTZ, organic or Fairtrade certification has almost become a requirement for doing business with European importers.

Rainforest Alliance/UTZ has large-scale operations, reaching mainstream markets in Europe. 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.

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](#). In June 2020, the Rainforest Alliance published its [new certification program](#) for farmers and companies. Audits under this new standard began in July 2021.

4C, which stands for Common Code for the Coffee Community, also serves the mainstream market. Access their website to find out [how to obtain a 4C certificate](#).

Table 1: Most important third-party certification standards requested by European coffee buyers

Name	Certification body	How to get certified?	Cost for companies
Rainforest Alliance	Access the list of authorized certification bodies of the Rainforest Alliance standard.	Consult the guide for farmers on how to get certified or consult the guide for companies on how to get certified. Operators usually undergo a full recertification audit process every 2-3 years.	The cost of Rainforest Alliance certification depends on the implementation of the standard, such as training, human resources, input and equipment and the audit costs. Refer to this post by Rainforest Alliance to read more about the costs of getting certified .
Fairtrade	FLOCERT	Consult this link to learn how to become a Fairtrade producer . Operators usually undergo a full recertification audit process every 1-2 years.	Access the cost calculator of FLOCERT to get an estimation about your costs for getting Fairtrade-certified.

4C	Access the list of certification bodies recognised by 4C.	Refer to the 4C certification process to learn more about getting certified. Operators usually undergo a full recertification audit process every 2-3 years.	The costs for getting certified are available upon request by 4C and depend on the size of your operations, among other things.
EU Organic	Access the list of recognised control bodies and control authorities for EU Organic, issued by the EU.	Refer to Regulation (EU) 2018/848 to learn more about the legislative requirements.	Costs vary and depend on set-up, scale, location, and non-conformities.
Fair for Life	ECOCERT	Access the Fair for Life certification process to learn about the steps that must be followed to become certified. Operators usually undergo a full recertification audit process every year.	Certification costs vary depending on the size and complexity of operation, location of your operation and of producers.
Small Producers Symbol (SPP)	Refer to this list for an overview of authorised certification entities .	Consult this guide for an overview of the general certification procedure for small producers' organisations .	Access this link for an overview of the costs for SPP certification .

Demeter	Consult this list to see which organisations are authorised as certification body by Demeter.	Access this page for an overview of the International Demeter Biodynamic Standard , and refer to this section on biodynamics to gain insights into the principles that form the foundation of Demeter certification.	Fees vary to a certain extent from country to country. The fees for licensees of the Federation are available upon request.
SMBC Bird Friendly	Access this list of certification bodies approved to inspect for Bird Friendly standards.	Access this page to get acquainted with the Bird Friendly farm criteria you need to comply with to be certified.	Certification costs vary and are available upon request by contacting the Bird Friendly coffee team .

Source: ProFound, 2021 (information retrieved from [ITC Standards Map](#) and specific standards' websites)

Read more about Fairtrade and organic in the section below.

Tips:

For a full overview of certification schemes, please consult the [ITC Standards Map](#).

Consider applying for certification. Certification can provide your company with opportunities such as trainings on more efficient agricultural practices and becoming independent of synthetic chemicals for fertilisation. In addition, certification can lead to access to new markets for exporters and cooperatives. Most certification schemes have trainings, tools or other types of assistance to help you understand the criteria and educate you on how to become certified.

When opting for certification, consider multiple certification schemes. For example, investigate the accessibility of certification programmes in your country or region, the credibility and recognition of the available certification programmes, the costs of certification and the type of certification preferred by buyers in your main European target markets.

Look into the different operators worldwide which handle [Rainforest Alliance/UTZ certification](#). This will provide you with insight into the countries where these certifications are most demanded, and the players which can be your potential buyers.

3. What are the requirements for niche markets?

If you want to enter a specific niche market, you should comply with specific niche requirements. These requirements will differ per buyer and may refer to one of the certification standards mentioned below. They primarily focus on strict and/or specific sustainability principles and apply to niche segments of the coffee market, some of which are increasingly present on mainstream markets – such as organic and fair trade. Meeting these additional requirements for value addition can increase your chances on the market considerably.

EU Organic and biodiversity-focused certification schemes

'Organic by default' does not exist from the perspective of European authorities and buyers. This means that organic certification entails more than 'naturally grown' and pesticide-free. In order to market coffee as 'organic' on the European market, it must comply with [EU legislation \(2018/848\)](#) on organic production and labelling. [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2306](#) describes rules on official controls and the certificate of inspection required for organic products and in-conversion products imported from third countries.

Note that this new EU organic regulation came into force on 1 January 2022. Producers in third countries (outside of the European Union) will now be subject to more rigorous inspections and verifications by authorities and control bodies. Inspections of organic production and organic products have become stricter to prevent fraud.

Before you can market your green 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 necessary information, such as importer address and TRACES number, first consignee, 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 organic exporter.

If you want to export to countries outside of the EU, check the legislation of that country. For instance, Switzerland has its own [Swiss Organic Law](#), and the [Organic Products Regulations 2009](#) apply in the United Kingdom. Note that countries outside the EU require a specific COI, such as the [GB COI](#).

In addition, most European countries also have their own voluntary organic standards and labels, next to the EU organic label. 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).

Note that most private standards have additional requirements on top of EU organic legislation. Therefore, always check the requirements on the official website of the standard itself. For instance, see [Naturland's comparison of its higher standards](#) with the EU organic regulation.

Next to EU organic, there are other certification standards that use organic certification as a baseline, such as Demeter and SMBC Bird Friendly. [Demeter](#) is a biodynamic certification label and regarded as the highest grade of organic farming in the world. Demeter's biodynamic certification requires biodiversity and ecosystem preservation, soil husbandry, livestock integration and prohibition of genetically engineered organisms.

[SMBC bird-friendly](#) certification promotes coffee farms that provide good, forest-like habitat for birds. Bird-friendly coffees are shade-grown, hence planted under a canopy of trees, and must also meet organic standards. Within Europe, the largest market for products certified by this standard is the United Kingdom.

Tips:

Consult the [International Trade Centre's Standards Map](#) database for a full overview of different organic labels and standards.

Familiarise yourself with the requirements of organic certification, for example the standard of the [International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements](#) (IFOAM).

Only use a certifier accredited by the EU. Otherwise, you will risk your certificate not being recognised by European buyers. Periodically, changes are made in the area of accredited inspection bodies. This is incorporated in TRACES.

If you have any questions about issuing a COI and what this means for your export, it is best to contact your inspection body. They are the first point of contact for further questions regarding any changes. Your (potential) client also may have information that can help you.

Read our study on [Exporting organic coffee to the European market](#) to learn more about the market for organic coffee in Europe.

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.

Fair trade certification

The most common fair trade standard in Europe is [Fairtrade International \(FLO\)](#). The accredited certifier for Fairtrade is [FLOCERT](#). Only after accreditation are you allowed to put the Fairtrade logo on your product.

Note that [Fairtrade has introduced new requirements for certification](#) on 1 June 2020. This will require coffee cooperatives, traders and other operators 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. This new requirement aims to ensure that new and current cooperatives will immediately be able to sell their coffee under Fairtrade terms, thus providing the related benefits to farmer members.

Fairtrade producers are paid a Fairtrade Minimum Price. The current minimum prices and premiums for coffee, whether organic-certified or conventional, can be found in the [Fairtrade Minimum Price and Fairtrade Premium Table](#). Refer to this [full guidance to learn more on how to become a Fairtrade producer](#).

Other fair trade standards used on the European market are [Fair for Life](#) (by [Ecocert IMO](#)) and [Fair Choice](#) (by Control Union). Both standards do have the advantage of fewer costs, as the control bodies may combine the fair trade audit with the organic or Rainforest Alliance audit. However, it is important to always check for demand and interest for a specific certification with your (potential) buyer. Also, in the case of Fair Choice and Fair for Life, check if and what kind of premium would be involved, as this is not regulated like in the case of Fairtrade's minimum price.

Another certification possibility is the [Small Producers' Symbol \(SPP\)](#). SPP focuses on social impact, adopting community-based sustainability principles. The SPP is supported by an independent certification system. Its label represents the alliance among organised small producers who build a local and global market that values the identity and the economic, social and cultural contributions of products from small producers' organisations. As a [producer](#) you can also become a part of this network.

Tip:

Before engaging in any sustainability certification programme, make sure to check (in consultation with your potential buyer) that this label has sufficient demand in your target market and is cost-beneficial for your product. For Fairtrade certification, for instance, you can use [this cost calculation tool](#).

High-end specialty coffee

The high-end specialty coffee segment is characterised by a very high cupping score (around 87 and above), innovative processes (such as natural and honey-processing), direct trade relations, and high transparency and traceability from source to consumer. This means that buyers of these coffees ask for requirements that go beyond the requirements for certification.

Besides high quality, these buyers are interested in your origin stories; for instance, information about your coffee farm, the coffee growers and your processing facilities. This implies that you should know the specifics of your coffee, from soil management to the cup, from variety to processing, from external suppliers to farmers, and must be willing to share these honestly. Other than that, direct trade may result in more frequent coffee farm visits and product assessments by your buyers, as well as long-term business relations.

Tips:

Read our tips on [finding buyers](#) and [doing business](#) in Europe to learn more about how you can invest in sharing your story online and prepare well for future buyer visits, among other things.

Read our study on [Exporting specialty coffee to the European market](#) to learn more about specialty coffee buyer expectations.

[ProFound – Advisers In Development](#) carried out this study on behalf of CBI.

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