

The Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) Coffee Sustainability Program Sustainability Foundation Course Outline

Venue Requirements

As this is an online course, all students are expected to have access to a stable, high-speed internet connection in a distraction-free environment. Please avoid background noise (e.g., from a roastery, café, or other) when joining the course. Headsets are also recommended to ensure audio clarity. Students should further prevent outside interruptions, such as from pets or household activities.

Course Hours

This is an 8-hour course delivered in four 2-hour live, online class sessions. The time to prepare for and take the exam is outside of this 8-hour window.

Course Preparation

Students are expected to treat each class session as a "live course" and should be prepared to take notes in the manner that is best for them. Students should arrive at least 5 minutes before the start of the first class session, and at least 2 minutes before the start of the remaining class sessions. Finally, students should prepare their coffee or take their bathroom breaks before the start of each class session. There will be a 5-minute break midway through each class.

Course Description

The SCA Coffee Sustainability Program Sustainability Foundation course introduces the term "sustainability" and describes its relevance to the coffee sector. Students will develop a shared understanding of how the industry can thrive when all actors across the value stream embrace sustainability, including its economic, environmental, and social components. Specifically, students will engage with sustainability terminology, historical influences on sustainability challenges today, and the evolving frameworks that drive more sustainability throughout the coffee sector. Additionally, the course will emphasize critical themes like systems thinking, the interconnectedness of coffee sector actors, and the challenges related to decision-making for sustainable action. Overall, upon completing this course, students will:

- Understand the definitions and pillars of sustainability, including its application to coffee.
- Explore key sustainability challenges and the trade-offs to consider when taking action.
- Recognize tools and approaches for improving context-specific sustainability outcomes.

Exam Format

Students will have 35 minutes to complete the exam, unless otherwise discussed between them and their trainer. The exam is available in English, Spanish, Chinese (Traditional and Simplified) and Korean. To pass the exam, students must answer 70% of the questions correctly. There will be 30 questions in total, which will be a mixture of true or false and multiple choice. Upon receiving a passing score, students will receive a Sustainability Foundation certificate from SCA.

Topics Covered

Session 1: Introduction to Sustainability

- Introduction to the course
- Defining sustainability, including the Brundtland definition and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals
- Exploring the three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social, and economic) and systems thinking
- Sustainability challenges in the coffee sector by pillar, and their visibility
- Strengths and limitations of two common sustainability approaches, voluntary sustainability standards and due diligence/reporting

Session 2: Fundamentals for Practicing Sustainability in Coffee

- Recap of Session 1
- Key actors across the value stream and their relationships/interconnections
- Understanding the concept of sustainability trade-offs and compromises when attempting to act sustainably
- Historical influences on sustainability today, including the impact of colonialism and shifts in economic theory
- The relevance of identity, equity, and intersectionality within the coffee sector

Session 3: Introduction to Climate and Coffee & Coffee Economics

- Recap of Session 2
- The role of climate change, its causes, and its effects on coffee production
- Other environmental challenges across the coffee value stream, and tools to address these challenges
- Key concepts underpinning coffee economics, including supply and demand and its interaction with climate change
- Exploring the role of price volatility and the C market, including its interaction with economic inequality across the value stream
- Tools for addressing economic challenges in the coffee sector

Session 4: Social Issues in Coffee & Developing a Sustainability Toolkit

- Recap of Session 3
- Social challenges in the coffee sector, including those that relate to labor and gender
- A reflection on the age of farmers and the challenges inherent to generational shifts in coffee communities
- Developing a "sustainability toolkit" and exploring how to use research to decide on context-specific actions in collaboration with others
- Final reflections