Case Study

Tchibo

Goodbye, Certification: How Tchibo is working with coffee farmers to make the market more climate resilient

Tchibo GmbH

Goodbye, Certification: How Tchibo is working with coffee farmers to make the market more climate resilient

As one of Europe's largest coffee roasters, Tchibo has a vested interest in ensuring the future of coffee production. Yet climate change and soil degradation could reduce global coffee-growing areas by as much as 50% by 2050. In response, Tchibo is working directly with smallholder farmers in its supply chain to promote sustainable farming methods - despite the fact that this approach is much more resource-intensive than sourcing coffee that is already certified as sustainable.

Risks behind the cup of coffee

Coffee is the economic foundation of Tchibo. Yet it is precisely this raw material that is under pressure: climate change, deforestation, and extreme weather are threatening growing conditions in many producing countries. This is where sustainability labels come in. They create transparency for consumers and boost demand for sustainable coffee.

For many producers, however, certification is out of reach. 70% of the world's approximately 12.5 million coffee farmers cultivate micro-farms of less than one hectare. They often live on incomes below the poverty line. They lack the money and the know-how to meet the requirements for labels. As a result, large quantities of coffee remain uncertified - often in areas where environmental risks are highest. According to the German Coffee Association, approximately 80% of the coffee purchased in Germany in 2024 was not certified as sustainable.

Profile Tchibo GmbH

Headquarters: Hamburg, Germany
Employees: 10,708
Revenue 2023: 3.2 billion euro
Founded: 1949
Core offering: Roasted coffee, single-serve systems, non-food product lines, e-commerce

From goal to implementation

Goals (SBTi-validated*): Reduction of direct emissions (Scope 1+2) by 42% (vs. 2022); of Scope 3 agricultural emissions by 30.3%, non-agricultural by 25% (vs. 2022); long-term net-zero by 2045.
In 2023, Tchibo launched its own coffee program in collaboration with Enveritas, a nonprofit organization specializing in satellite- and AI-based landscape analysis. Goal: To source all coffee through "responsible purchasing" by 2027 and to drive sustainable transformation where certifications do not apply.

*Science Based Targets initiative

1. Analysis of growing regions
Enveritas analyzes coffee plantations in all major coffee-growing countries worldwide. They provide Tchibo with a report and auditable data on sustainability dimensions (e.g. child labor, soil quality, pesticide use) in Tchibo's growing regions.

2. Region-specific measures
Tchibo develops measures for the key sustainability risks identified in the report that are tailored to the local challenges.

3. Implementation
The measures are implemented through local partners such as cooperatives, exporters, and NGOs, as well as through demonstration farms, tree nurseries, and training programs.

4. Independent impact assessment
Enveritats assesses the implementation and success of the measures

Responsible Coffee at Tchibo

For Tchibo, “responsibly sourced coffee” means actively acknowledging the challenges in coffee farming and addressing them at the source. Instead of relying solely on existing certifications, Tchibo accompanies and supports coffee farmers on their journey to meet key environmental, social, and economic requirements.

- On-site, coffee farmers receive training on fertilizer use, soil management, climate resilience, and ways to increase productivity and quality.

- Brazil: Focus on biodiversity, climate, and water
- Honduras: Focus on poverty reduction
- Kenya: Focus on productivity, quality, income diversification, and women & youth

Challenges & Investments

- Many coffee farmers, especially unorganized smallholders, first face the fundamental challenge of being able to operate their plantations economically at all. Accordingly, measures often need to start with economic stability before environmental or social standards can be implemented.

- Investments in the coffee program and greater transparency toward customers do not constitute a market advantage. Too much information about the reality of coffee farming irritates customers.

- Transformation can only succeed with sustained investment and knowledge transfer. For Tchibo, the program is therefore not a sustainability initiative whose benefits are immediately reflected in economic success or measurable environmental metrics, but rather a long-term process that drives change over the years and secures the product line.

Why did it pay off?

The interim report from April 2025 shows:

- Within a year, Tchibo reached more than 22,000 farmers in nine countries.
- Meanwhile, nearly 30 percent of the coffee used comes from what Tchibo calls “responsible coffee.”

Thus, Tchibo strengthens relationships along the supply chain and ensures that investments are directed to where they are needed most.

> Sustainability in coffee is a journey. The most pressing question is: How can coffee farmers improve their economic situation while also better positioning themselves against climate change and other crises?”
>
> *Pablo von Waldenfels, Director of Corporate Responsibility at Tchibo*

Conclusion & Outlook

Tchibo uses sustainability reporting to gain transparency into internal processes and to set goals based on reliable data. This allows the company to identify key areas of action for its coffee program, addressing sustainability risks at their source: the supply chain. Some companies in the coffee sector are already pursuing similar approaches, but from Tchibo’s perspective, the movement must grow significantly to have a real impact. The company calls on policymakers to regularly review ESG regulations and critically assess whether they actually contribute to effective environmental and human rights protection. Regulatory requirements and uncertainty must not paralyze impact work.

Case studies from Tchibo’s Coffee Country Program

Kahawa Skuli – Supporting the Next Generation of Coffee Farmers in Tanzania

Since 2017, around 900 students at seven schools have been learning about sustainable coffee farming through the “Kahawa Skuli” school project in Tanzaniain. Through so-called Coffee Clubs, they learn what natural fertilizers are available, how to best protect water and soil, and about the sales channels that exist for sustainable coffee. What makes this special is that the young people apply their knowledge directly to small plots on their parents’ farms and cultivate their own coffee plants.

The students deliver: their coffee has already been purchased by Tchibo for the third time and is being sold as a limited-edition project coffee. At the same time, the knowledge gained by the young farmers spreads to their families and communities, thereby strengthening sustainable farming methods locally and in the long term.

Peru – Building Infrastructure for Sustainable Coffee Farming

By expanding its coffee program to Peru, Tchibo is specifically targeting regions with high social and environmental risks. In the Junín region, many smallholder farmers are struggling with declining yields, pests, and the effects of climate change.

At the heart of the approach is the systematic development of local structures: Over a five-year period, Tchibo is collaborating with approximately 1,800 smallholder farmers across four provinces. A team of six agronomists conducts training sessions on demonstration plots, which are specifically established on the farms of selected producers and distributed across the region. This model is complemented by so-called “Change Leaders,” who act as liaisons, regularly visit farmers, and support the implementation of the measures.