



**INTERNATIONAL
COFFEE
ORGANIZATION**

FGSC 06/26

13 May 2026

Original: English

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**Report of the 4th meeting of the Focus
Group on Specialty Coffee held on
13 October 2025**

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**REPORT OF THE 4TH MEETING
OF THE FOCUS GROUP ON SPECIALTY COFFEE HELD ON 13 OCTOBER 2025**

1. The Executive Director, in her capacity as Chair of the Focus Group on Specialty Coffee (FGSC), welcomed participants and informed them that this was the Focus Group's fourth meeting and the first to be held in person. She added that it followed three virtual meetings and was intended to be informal and discussion-oriented.

Item 1 Draft Agenda

2. The Executive Director presented the draft Agenda, contained in document [FGSC-05/25](#), and informed participants that the meeting would consist of a presentation by the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) on its definition of specialty coffee, a recap of previous discussions on definitions, and an exchange of views on next steps.

3. The Focus Group adopted the agenda with no objections.

Item 2 Introduction of the Specialty Coffee Association definition

Item 3 Harmonization of definitions of specialty coffee

4. The Executive Director recalled that discussions on specialty and high-premium coffees had begun approximately two and a half years earlier, following a request from the delegation of Panama to establish a forum for dialogue on this topic. She noted that the delegation of Panama had highlighted the country's expertise in producing small volumes of high-quality coffees and had proposed the creation of a discussion group rather than a formal committee.

5. The Executive Director reported that the proposal had been approved by consensus at the 136th Session of the International Coffee Council (ICC) meeting in Bengaluru, India, and that participation in the FGSC was open to all Members of the International Coffee Organization (ICO).

6. The Executive Director further recalled that, during the first meeting of the FGSC, Members had expressed an interest in obtaining data on specialty coffee, understanding the size of the market, promoting quality and specialty coffees, and supporting research and varietal development to improve quality. She added that, during subsequent meetings, Members had agreed that data availability was the highest priority and that measuring the specialty coffee market required a common definition. The Executive Director noted that Members had therefore been invited to share their own definitions, as subsequently provided in document [FGSC-3/24 Rev. 1](#), and that a review of the existing public definitions had revealed significant differences in approaches and perspectives.

7. The Executive Director informed the participants that the ICO and SCA had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (document [ICC-136-8](#)) two years earlier to strengthen producer education, improve quality and facilitate access to markets. She stated that, in this context, the SCA had been invited to present its current definition of specialty coffee.

8. Ms Kim Elena Ionescu, Chief Strategy Development Officer at the SCA, stated that the SCA was the world's largest coffee membership association, representing more than 100,000 members across the value chain, and noted that since the merger of the European and North American associations in 2017, the SCA had been working towards becoming a global organization.

9. Ms Ionescu reported that, in around 2019–2020, the SCA had recognized the need to formally define specialty coffee in a way that would allow market measurement and analysis. She explained that specialty coffee had historically been associated with the concept of quality, but that quality was subjective and difficult to measure consistently. She continued to explain that the SCA had therefore adopted an approach based on attributes, explaining that coffees could be distinguished by a combination of intrinsic attributes, such as physical characteristics and flavour profile, and extrinsic attributes, such as origin, variety, certification and farm identity. Ms Ionescu added that coffees could be placed along a continuum from undifferentiated commodity coffee to highly differentiated specialty or luxury coffee, depending on the number and desirability of the attributes present.

10. Ms Ionescu highlighted the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic coffee attributes. She explained that some of the intrinsic or material attributes might include things like bean appearance or size, flavour profile and elements that can be assessed during cupping.

11. Ms Ionescu highlighted that extrinsic attributes were also valuable, especially for highly differentiated coffees, for which a significant share of the value for the buyer or consumer comes from knowing information such as the variety of the coffee, the country of origin or the farm name. As a result, she added that the SCA wanted to measure both types and use them to place coffees along the aforementioned continuum.

12. Ms Ionescu noted that attributes were measurable and could be objectively identified, allowing comparisons across markets. She added that understanding how different markets valued specific attributes would enable more accurate market analysis and preference mapping, and shared that, in 2021, the SCA had adopted the following definition:

Specialty coffee is a coffee or coffee experience that is recognized for its distinctive attributes and, because of those attributes, has significantly higher value in the marketplace.

13. Ms Ionescu explained that this definition had later underpinned the development of the Coffee Value Assessment (CVA), launched in 2023, which replaced the 2004 SCA cupping protocol and provided a practical application for the definition. She concluded her presentation by inviting questions and comments from Members.

14. The delegate of Colombia, Mr Germán Alberto Bahamón Jaramillo, stated that specialty coffee was of strategic importance for Colombia, noting that the country identified itself as the land of specialty coffees. He reported that Colombia had been working extensively on specialty coffee and that the CVA had enabled the identification of distinct cup attributes across regions such as Nariño and Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

15. The delegate of Colombia further noted that the forum provided by the FGSC was extremely valuable in creating a common ground for discussion. He welcomed the invitation that had been extended to the SCA and expressed Colombia's view that the SCA definition should be adopted rather than reinvented. The delegate of Colombia added that the general definition should serve as an overarching framework and be used as a benchmark under which producing countries could undertake their own market-specific work.

16. The representative of Brazil and Executive Director of the Brazil Specialty Coffee Association (BSCA), Mr Vinicius Estrela, stated that a shared definition of specialty coffee would allow producing countries to better communicate diversity, sensory experiences and value creation, including storytelling around specialty coffees to enhance value recognition for producers. He noted that such a definition would support analysis, promotion and positioning of coffee as a differentiated product with added value in global markets. He emphasized the importance of a common language that integrated producers and consumers along the value chain.

17. The delegate of Honduras, H.E. Ambassador Iván Romero-Martínez, congratulated the Secretariat for including specialty coffee on the Organization's agenda. He stated that the topic reflected ongoing changes in the coffee sector and was relevant to all producing countries, including from a policy perspective.

18. The delegate of India, Mr Kurma Rao, welcomed the discussion and noted that different individuals and cultures valued different attributes. He asked whether any studies or market-profiling exercises had been conducted or were planned to identify which attributes were rewarded in different markets.

19. Ms Ionescu responded that the objective of the SCA's work was precisely to enable such analysis. She explained that, historically, the absence of a measurable definition had limited the ability to conduct large-scale studies. Ms Ionescu reported that SCA was integrating the CVA into

digital tools to capture cupping data in producing and consuming markets and acknowledged that current datasets were still limited.

20. The delegate of Colombia highlighted the importance of segmenting the market and analysing evolving consumer preferences for coffee attributes in different destination markets. He then suggested that the SCA be invited to participate formally in the FGSC.

21. The delegate from Papua New Guinea, Mr Michael Wheeler, noted that data collection would be critical, given that buyer preferences differed and evolved over time, and asked how data-collection methodologies would address these challenges given that different buyers would value different attributes in different ways.

22. Ms Ionescu indicated that the SCA was pursuing a dual approach, combining large-scale digital data collection with targeted collaboration with buyers and buyer groups in specific markets. She stated that this approach was expected to improve data quality and adoption over time. However, she noted that a big-data approach was still in an early stage.

23. The Executive Director asked whether there were any objections to the delegate of Colombia's proposal to formally invite the SCA to participate in the Focus Group.

24. The FGSC accepted the proposal.

25. The Executive Director further proposed that the Secretariat, in collaboration with the SCA, review and harmonize the definitions of specialty coffee submitted by Members and circulated in document [FGSC-03/24 Rev. 1](#), and identify key constraints or contradictions.

26. The FGSC agreed to the proposal.

Item 4 Date of next meeting

27. The Executive Director informed delegates that the next meeting of the FGSC would be held in a few months' time.

Item 5 Other business

28. There were no requests for other business.