

# A decade of Ernesto Illy International Coffee Award: experts gather at FAO HQ in Rome to discuss the future of coffee

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Ten years ago, illycaffè launched the Ernesto Illy International Coffee Award to promote and reward quality. Over this decade, the sector's crisis has become systemic: the convergence of extreme weather events in major origins, market and currency volatility, often amplified by speculation, and rising costs along the value chain have

pushed coffee prices to record highs and increased the vulnerability of farming communities. Midway through this journey, the adoption of regenerative agriculture delivered tangible results: a lower environmental footprint, greater productive capacity, and a further step up in cup quality. As pioneers of direct sourcing, illycaffè works hand in hand with growers, recognizing sustainable quality and transferring knowledge through the Università del Caffè. This model has accelerated the adoption of regenerative practices and made the gains in resilience and quality measurable in the field.

At FAO headquarters in Rome, during the roundtable of the 2025 edition of the award, experts agreed on the need to extend this model to coffee cultivation worldwide, pairing agronomic approaches with targeted investment and technologies that can accelerate adoption, particularly artificial intelligence for climate-suitability analysis, early-warning systems, and in-field decision support.

Titled "A decade of change: the coffee industry on the path to sustainable quality," the panel was moderated by Andrea Cabrini (Managing Director, Class CNBC) and brought together Andrea Illy (Chairman, illycaffè; Co-Chair, Regenerative Society Foundation), Vanusia Nogueira (Executive Director, International Coffee Organization), Carlos Santana (Commercial Director, EISA – Ecom



Finalists EIICA 2025

Group), Michele Arias (Sustainability Manager, UNEX Guatemala S.A. – Itochu Group), José Ernesto Borja Papini (CEO, J.J. Borja Nathan S.A., El Salvador), and Paolo Rubano (President, Agorai Foundation).

Andrea Illy said: “With the launch of the Ernesto Illy International Coffee Award ten years ago, we further strengthened our path to improving quality. The experience of these years has taught us how to adapt cultivation to the climate and mitigate environmental impact. This journey has shown that resilience and quality grow hand in hand, and it has given us the opportunity to tell consumers about the world behind each of the 10 million cups of illy coffee enjoyed every day.”

Bruno Archi, Permanent Representative of Italy to the UN Agencies in Rome, opened the proceedings: “Coffee touches billions of lives, yet its value chain remains exposed to climate shocks, price volatility, and trade imbalances, risks borne most acutely by millions of smallholders. Italy is firmly committed to a more inclusive and resilient coffee economy, where excellence in sustainable quality goes hand-in-hand with close collaboration with farmers. In this spirit, we celebrate the Ernesto Illy International Coffee Award as a benchmark for sustainable production, and together with FAO and other specialized agencies, we must encourage and reflect on the development of more equitable and resilient models of production and consumption, including support for sustainable production through agroecological and other innovative approaches, fair trade, and the mitigation of environmental impacts.”

Vanusia Nogueira, Executive Director of the International Coffee Organization, commented: “Coffee is an experiential beverage, tied to traditions and rituals. This is why we have a duty to take every measure necessary to protect our plantations from the climatic adversities they are facing. We owe it to those who came before us, and we owe it to the plantations themselves, which deserve a future. Encouragingly, many coffee consumers today are young; this compels us even more to engage with a generation that is more aware and demands sustainability in the cup. We are also seeing this new generation among growers, who are increasingly turning to powerful new technologies such as artificial intelligence.”

During the event, the winners for each of the nine origins that compose the illy blend were announced; the overall “Best of the Best” will be revealed at the evening Gala. On 5 November, all 27 finalists were received at the Papal General Audience in the Vatican.

The Ernesto Illy International Coffee Award is illycaffè’s annual recognition celebrating the finest sustainably grown coffees from the origins that compose its unique blend. Born in 2016 as the global evolution of the Prêmio Ernesto Illy de Qualidade do Café para Espresso (launched in Brazil in 1991), EICA honors producers who excel in sustainable quality and collaboration. An independent international jury selects the “Best of the Best” from 27 finalist lots sourced from the blend’s nine countries: Brazil, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Nicaragua, and Rwanda. A consumer jury also assigns the “Coffee Lovers’ Choice.”

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