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Creating a sustainable Barista Championship event

Emma McDougall reveals how the NZSCA ensured the 2024 Aotearoa Barista Championship was the organisation's most sustainable event to date.

The Aotearoa Barista Championship is a joyous celebration of the artistry and dedication of baristas, bringing together more than 300 passionate individuals at Whirinaki Whare Toanga in Upper Hutt.

While the star of the show is the coffee on stage, there's a small team of amazing volunteers working behind the scenes to make sure everything runs smoothly. In 2024, a shift in event hire policies presented us with an opportunity to fully embrace sustainability. We rose to the challenge, ensuring every aspect of the event contributed to a positive environmental impact. Some of it was messy, some of it was clean, but it was all in an effort to move towards an event that we could be proud of.

Sustainability was at the heart of the 2024 Barista Championship, with all waste diligently collected and sorted into appropriate recycling processes. Think 12 crates of milk bottles washed and put into the correct recycling stream. Volunteers and judges were encouraged to bring their own reusable drink bottles, playing a key role in reducing single-use plastics and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility.

To further minimise waste, a dedicated kit filled with reusable crockery was provided for baristas, ensuring competition rounds left no unnecessary footprint. Thoughtfully curated sponsored goodie bags showcased sustainability, featuring reusable and limited plastic items. Event T-shirts, printed in Dunedin using sustainable ink, arrived without any unnecessary packaging. Traditional plastic event materials were replaced with sustainable tags and string, while volunteers and staff utilised reusable aprons, pencils, and clipboards. Even event sheets were responsibly shredded and



Sponsored goodie bags featured reusable items with limited plastic. Image: ATPhoto.

recycled post-event, ensuring a full-circle approach to sustainability.

No resource was wasted. Cardboard from the event was given new life as weed suppressant for local gardens or was saved for future reuse. Compost boxes were made readily available, ensuring organic waste was repurposed rather than discarded. Soft packaging found a second home in the local council's recycling collection, while limited landfill was removed by friends, a task made even greener thanks to the dedication of volunteer AP, who transported it using his electric car. Huge thanks to the Meadow Fresh team who took other parts of the polystyrene to the Mitre 10 recycling station.

The sustainability ethos extended into hospitality, ensuring kai (food) for sponsors and volunteers was provided with minimal packaging. Reusable cutlery and crockery were utilised to eliminate unnecessary waste. A reusable cup library was introduced by sponsor Acme Cups, revolutionising beverage service by allowing attendees to borrow and return cups throughout the event and reducing

the reliance on disposables. Thanks to our incredible volunteers who washed these.

Honouring the champions of the event was done in the most sustainable way possible. Trophies were crafted from locally sourced wood and engraved by skilled local artisans, reducing transport emissions while supporting the local economy.

The Aotearoa Barista Championship proved that a large-scale event can be both exciting and environmentally responsible. Every initiative taken contributed to reducing waste, conserving resources, and setting a gold standard for sustainable event management. This event serves as a beacon for future championships, showcasing that sustainability and excellence go hand in hand. We often talk about our waste at the café or roastery, and now events are in the spotlight. With continued dedication and innovation, we can brew a better, greener future for coffee events and beyond. ■



For more information on the New Zealand Specialty Coffee Association, or to join, visit nzscs.org