

BLOG POST

Why Spartan Coffee Roasters Is More Than a Coffee Shop

The sun rises on a spring morning above the MSU Union Building. Inside, students are beginning their daily routines; drink a coffee, study for an exam, go to class, repeat. The hiss of the milk steamer behind the counter at Spartan Coffee Roasters harmonizes with the sound of chatter throughout the first floor.

Different people with different majors are sitting in different seats, but they're more similar than they think. They're all at the Union, choosing SCR over an off-campus coffee shop because they know it means something more than just getting their daily caffeine in.

"Usually I work jobs to make some extra money, but working here, money seems like an added bonus since I'm learning so many valuable skills," an employee said. "Giving back to the community always puts me in a good mood, so when I'm working I always have a smile on my face."

Many of the student employees recognize that SCR is more important than the typical service job, every role is essential to the team. From crafting drinks to managing operations or creating marketing content, student employees are part of something that extends beyond the daily routine.

That sense of belonging is intentional. Over 10 years ago, the Spartan Coffee Roasters founders, two MSU alumni, were also going to class, studying, and trying to answer all of the questions about what comes next. Today, the company employs 15 MSU students and offers paid management internships designed to provide hands-on leadership experience.

Now, they've brought more than just coffee to MSU's campus. They've brought new stories, a place to slow down, real world skills employees can carry forward, and most importantly, a place that cares about students and sustainability.

The impact SCR is making goes beyond just employment, though.

Through its partnership with Michigan State University, Spartan Coffee Roasters commits 10% of its annual profits to student scholarships and sustainability initiatives. For students, that means the space they study in and the coffee they rely on, contributes

directly to opportunities within their own community. There's a reason SCR's CEO, Jamal Rivera, keeps saying "By Spartans, for Spartans." He means it.

"It's cool to know that something as simple as buying coffee can support other students," another employee said. "It makes it feel more connected."

The idea of connection also shows up in how the company approaches its role on campus. The MSU Union has always been a place where students gather not just to work, but to take a break, meet friends or reset between busy moments. Spartan Coffee Roasters builds on that environment, aiming to create a space that feels welcoming rather than overwhelming.

During midterms and finals, having balance matters. SCR is a place where students can go to study, slow down, and connect with their community rather than feel stressed.

Spartan Coffee Roasters is committed to transparency regarding sustainability. They are mindful of questions that come with growing visibility. Environmental responsibility is a core part of SCR's operations through sourcing fair-trade beans and using compostable cups and packaging. What's as important as sustainability to the founders is being clear and transparent about what those commitments mean in practice.

Students are watching their favorite companies and brands, noticing if they follow through on their transparency efforts, making it so much more important for SCR to keep that promise.

Therefore, transparency remains a priority. While aligning with MSU sustainability standards or working with local partners to reduce environmental impact, the goal is to approach these efforts with clarity and accountability.

As it gets closer to sunset, students continue going into the Union for coffee and out for classes, repeating again. The employees still have some time left of their shift, and continue working, not by just making espresso, but learning, adapting and contributing to something that reflects their own experience as Spartans.

Spartan Coffee Roasters is where students gain experience, where alumni give back and where everyday routines connect to something larger. It's about opportunity, community and the shared experience of being a part of Michigan State.

And for many people, that's what makes it more than just a coffee shop.