



Linking Food Company Sustainability Back to the Farm

As the planet marches toward a population of more than 11 billion people by mid-century, and the impacts of climate change are more commonly evident, consumers are thinking about how their actions impact the environment. According to food industry supplier ADM's Top 5 Global Food Trends 2021, approximately 65 percent of consumers say they want to have a positive impact on the environment through their everyday actions. This goal is a key reason why 32 percent of consumers buy sustainably produced items¹.

To meet consumers' demands for sustainability, food companies continue to evolve how they address sustainability. Today's Corporate Social Responsibility platforms have replaced simple efforts focused on activities like recyclability of packaging or reducing energy use in production with in-depth plans focused on both environmental sustainability as well as the communities and people they serve. The conversations around sustainability have grown in complexity too, with topics like water quality, land use and carbon sequestration becoming more commonplace. According to a 2020 Deloitte study, in 2019, sixty-seven percent of residential consumers surveyed agree strongly or somewhat with the statement "I'm very concerned about climate change and my personal carbon footprint."²

Sustainability Good for Business

Consumers are aligning their purchases with their interest in environmental sustainability, improving the bottom line for companies that choose to prioritize sustainability within their business model. A 2018 study from NYU's Stern Center for Sustainable Business found that 50% of consumer packaged goods growth from 2013 to 2018 came from sustainability-marketed products.

Further, products with a sustainability claim on-pack accounted for 16.6% of the market in 2018, up from 14.3% in 2013, and delivered nearly \$114 billion in sales, up 29% from 2013. Most important, products marketed as sustainable grew 5.6 times faster than those that were not. In more than 90% of the CPG categories, sustainability-marketed products grew faster than their conventional counterparts.³



Linking Food Company Sustainability Back to the Farm

Creating Opportunities

So, how can food companies improve the sustainability of their products while being able to communicate an increasingly complicated story to consumers? One way is better aligning themselves with the farming of crops like U.S. grown soybeans.

The vast majority of consumers, 79%, have a very/somewhat positive view of U.S. farmers who grow crops, including soybeans, according to a **consumer survey** released by the **United Soybean Board**. And this positive view is earned in part through the sustainability efforts of farmers. For example, soybean farmers across the U.S. are committed to growing high-quality, sustainable crops to consumer needs. In fact, **95% of U.S. soybean** producers partner with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to implement conservation programs on their farms. These programs may include efforts that improve soil health such as conservation tillage, which can reduce soil erosion as much as 90%, crop rotation, using cover crops as well as practices that improve water quality such as precision irrigation and managing nutrient run off.

“We have successfully **reduced greenhouse gas emissions** by 38% per metric ton since 1980 but recognize that our contribution cannot stop there,” noted David Iverson, USB Sustainability Target Area coordinator and soybean farmer from South Dakota.

Despite their current good standing, U.S. soybean farmers continue to strengthen their goals, seeking to reduce land use impact by 10 percent (acres per bushel), reduce soil erosion an additional 25 percent (acres per bushel), increase energy use efficiency by 10 percent (BTUs per year), and reduce total greenhouse gas emissions by 10 percent on a pounds CO₂ — equivalent gasses emitted per year.

And the payoff can be expected with consumers. According to a United Soybean Board study, two-thirds (66%) of consumers felt more positive about soy protein and soybean oil as an ingredient in many food products after reading about the sustainability of soybeans.⁴

-
1. Archer Daniels Midland, ADM, “Top 5 Global Food Trends 2021.”
 2. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ec/Documents/energy-resources/Deloitte%20Resources%202019%20Study319.pdf>
 3. <https://hbr.org/2019/06/research-actually-consumers-do-buy-sustainable-products>
 4. <https://ussoy.org/survey-emphasizes-consumer-trust-in-u-s-farmers/>