

Sustainability: Best Practices in the Food Industry

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability is an emerging megatrend that is vitally important for businesses to understand and implement into their everyday practices. The triple bottom line of sustainability includes not only looking at economic performance, but also considering environmental and social impacts as well. Companies that build their business practices with sustainability in their DNA will have greater chances of success than companies that have to transform their practices. Sustainable consumption has become a core objective and one of the biggest factors of change for individual consumers looking to do their part in saving the planet. Companies have responded by bringing out new brand and product introductions in line with sustainable interests. Numerous companies in the food industry utilize best practices of sustainability, with eight of those being accessed in this research paper. Each of these companies utilizes the triple bottom line of sustainability, and many of them were built with sustainability in their DNA, which is what greatly contributes to their success.

INTRODUCTION

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability has been defined in many different ways over the past few decades, but has often set its focus on environmental concerns (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011). The most widely known and used definition of sustainability is “the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” as taken from the World Commission on Environment and Development (Chabowski, Mena and Gonzalez-Padron, 2011; Huang and Rust, 2011; Closs, Speier and Meacham, 2011). This definition emphasizes the importance of environmental quality and the conservation of nature’s assets in consumption (Huang and Rust, 2011). Sustainability has also been defined, in general, as consumption that can continue indefinitely without the degradation of natural, physical, human, and intellectual capital (Crittenden, Crittenden, Ferrell, Ferrell and Pinney, 2011). Underlining each definition of sustainability is what is referred to as the Triple Bottom Line, a perspective based on three important dimensions: environmental quality, social equity, and economic prosperity (Chabowski, Mena and Gonzalez-Padron, 2011; Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011).

The Triple Bottom Line of sustainability is the implication that assessment of business results should be based on not only economic performance, but also on environmental and social impacts as well (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011). The environmental quality dimension has its focus on firm activities that do not erode natural resources through corporate environmental management. The social equity dimension of the Triple Bottom Line encourages firms to consider their impact on society and addresses issues akin to community relations, education support, and charitable contributions. This implies that corporations should not knowingly do anything to harm any of their stakeholders. Finally, the economic prosperity dimension centers on the value creation and enhanced financial performance of a firm’s activities. Economic prosperity implies that maintaining sustainability can lead to economic success and enhancement to the firm’s reputation (Chabowski, Mena and Gonzalez-Padron, 2011; Crittenden, Crittenden, Ferrell, Ferrell and Pinney, 2011). There is a longstanding belief that managing the Triple Bottom Line will lead to improved efficiency and profitability over the long term for firms (Closs, Speier and Meacham, 2011).

The topic of sustainability has become regarded as an “emerging megatrend” that is vitally important for businesses, including stakeholders, investors, customers, and policymakers, to understand and implement (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011). A business megatrend forces fundamental and persistent shifts in how companies compete, and such forces come from transformations in technological innovation or from new ways of doing business (Lubin and Esty, 2010). Managers and executives are concerned that they are facing an unprecedented

journey for which there is no road map in the gradual shift of focus in business to sustainability. With sustainability being referred to as an emerging megatrend, however, it allows its course to be somewhat predictable. Managers just need to understand how firms have succeeded in past megatrends to help them craft strategies and systems to gain advantage in this one (Lubin and Esty, 2010). Two initiatives can help companies become sustainable. First, the company's top management team must decide to focus on the problem, and second, they need to recruit and retain the right kind of people. If these two things are done right, change can happen quickly (Nidumolu, Prahalad and Rangaswami, 2009).

The Rise of Sustainable Interests

Interests in sustainability have increased over the years, and are extremely prevalent in today's society. For some people, the notion of sustainability is not that important, but for others, it has become a mission (Seyfang 2006; Closs, Speier and Meacham, 2011). According to Lubin and Esty (2010), the economic downturn of the late 1970s, along with the 1979 oil shock, is what first drove the dramatic shift in consumer preferences toward efficiency, causing many industries to start transforming towards sustainable business practices (Lubin and Esty, 2010). Corporate interest in sustainability has been influenced by several different factors. Among these factors are carbon budgets, the cradle-to-cradle life cycles of products, energy and pollution costs, natural resource use, and consumer concerns with these issues (Press and Arnould, 2009). Press and Arnould (2009) argue that the economic benefits of sustainability thinking to corporate cost controls and reductions in environmental liabilities have driven significant corporate sustainability initiatives. Consumer interests in environmentally friendly products also have a large influence on the shift towards sustainability practices in business. One survey's results showed that most U.S. consumers indicated that they would choose a product from an environmentally friendly company if it cost the same as other available alternatives (Luchs, Walker Naylor, Irwin and Raghunathan, 2010). As Vermeir and Verbeke state, "interest in sustainability, sustainable production and consumption has increased at all levels of the agriculture and food chain increasing the potential influence of sustainability claims on consumers' purchase decisions" (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2004).

Sustainability is generally accepted nowadays as the key success factor in the long-term business strategy of firms, and firms that incorporate sustainability into their marketing strategy are thought to have a differential competitive advantage over other companies (Crittenden, Crittenden, Ferrell, Ferrell and Pinney, 2011). As the global population continues to increase, business and consumer practices must change, because environmental issues such as climate change have become one of the greatest personal concerns for people for the next five years (Press and Arnould, 2009; Chouinard, Ellison and Ridgeway, 2011). According to Chouinard, Ellison, and Ridgeway (2011), the global population is projected to grow from 6.9 billion people to nearly 9 billion people by 2050. In a report from the Global Humanitarian Forum from 2009, it was estimated that every year climate change causes over 300,000 deaths and leaves 325 million people seriously affected. If the population continues to increase as predicted, these numbers will also increase (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011). Issues such as global warming and climate change related to greenhouse gases can be addressed by societal engagement to aid in reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Renewable energy, recycling, and encouraging consumers to modify lifestyles are all relatable to the climate of societal engagement to reduce toxic emissions (Crittenden, Crittenden, Ferrell, Ferrell and Pinney, 2011).

Sustainability as Innovation

The concept of sustainability has evolved across three eras. Sustainability was first seen as an operational concern, consisting largely of defensive efforts to reduce companies' environmental footprints and cut waste. Next it shifted from cost reduction to innovation, also called Sustainability 2.0, which is the forefront of this section. Today the world is currently in the midst of the third era, which simply became the concept as to how business is done (Chouinard, Ellison and Ridgeway, 2011). Nidumolu, Prahalad, and Rangaswami state that becoming environmentally friendly lowers costs for companies, because they ultimately end up reducing the inputs they use, and the process generates additional revenues from better products or enables companies to create new businesses. The key to progress, particularly in times of economic crisis, is innovation, and if companies are smart, they will treat sustainability as innovation's new frontier. Robert B. Shapiro, chairman and CEO of Monsanto Company was quoted in an interview saying, "None of us today, whether we're managing a house or running a business, is living in a sustainable way...The whole system has to change; there's a huge opportunity for reinvention (Magretta, 1997). Shapiro was saying that firms cannot ignore sustainability. They need to accept that this is where business is going, and then be able to embrace it in order to successfully implement or transform their business practices to meet the needs of sustainability. The transformation to sustainable business practices is not easy, but if companies go through five distinct stages of change, they will face different challenges at each stage allowing them to develop new capabilities for successful sustainable innovation (Nidumolu, Prahalad and Rangaswami, 2009).

The first stage in the innovation process is to view compliance as opportunity, which involves working with other companies to implement creative solutions, and to have the ability to anticipate and shape regulations. This allows companies to experiment with sustainable technologies, materials, and processes. The second stage is to make value chains sustainable. The competencies needed in this stage are expertise in techniques such as carbon management and life-cycle assessment, the ability to redesign operations to use less energy and water, produce fewer emissions, and generate less waste, and the capacity to ensure that suppliers and retailers make their operations eco-friendly. Stage three is to design sustainable products and services to become more eco-friendly. The abilities needed for the completion of this stage are the skills to knowing which products or services are most unfriendly to the environment, the ability to generate real public support for sustainable offerings, and the management know-how to scale both supplies of green materials and the manufacture of products. The fourth stage of sustainable innovation is to develop new business models that will deliver and capture values changing the basis of competition. This can be accomplished by having the capacity to understand what consumers want and to figure out different ways to meet those demands. The fifth and final stage is to create next-practice platforms. The competencies required for successful completion of this stage is the knowledge of how renewable and nonrenewable resources affect business ecosystems and industries, and the expertise to synthesize business models, technologies, and regulations in different industries (Nidumolu, Prahalad and Rangaswami, 2009).

Sustainability DNA and Benchmarking

A company's DNA holds the deeply rooted set of values and beliefs that provide behavioral norms that trigger or shape sustainability activities, and a company's tendency toward sustainability is a result of its DNA. The dynamic capabilities of a company's DNA focus on what the company chooses to do in understanding and integrating social and environmental considerations into its assessment of market risks and opportunities when developing new products. The article by Crittenden, Crittenden, Ferrell, Ferrell, and Pinney (2011) states that there are two types of sustainability brand growth strategies based off a company's DNA. The first is a leadership brand strategy, which is when a company injects sustainability into their portfolio of brands, meaning sustainability is replicated within the brand portfolio. The second is an integration-innovation strategy, which is when a company slowly makes its products more sustainable without suggesting that it is anything out of the ordinary for the company. This strategy is used when the company's products were not identified originally as sustainable offerings (Crittenden, Crittenden, Ferrell, Ferrell and Pinney, 2011). There are some companies, however, that choose to not be committed to sustainability and going green. Some of these companies unethically engage in a concept called "greenwashing," which involves misleading consumers into thinking that their products are more environmentally friendly than they truly are (Crittenden, Crittenden, Ferrell, Ferrell and Pinney, 2011).

Companies seeking to enhance their business performance should utilize benchmarking, a structured process by which a firm seeks to identify and replicate "best practices" that produce superior results in other firms, as a way to enhance its own competitive advantage. Benchmarking is a market-based learning approach that has been recognized as an important source of sustainable competitive advantage in marketing (Voorhies and Morgan, 2005). The authors of a particular research article on benchmarking, Voorhies and Morgan, offer eight distinct marketing capabilities that are viewed as contributing to business performance and therefore suitable for benchmarking. The eight marketing capabilities are as follows: product development, pricing, channel management, marketing communications, selling, market information management, marketing planning, and marketing implementation. It is suggested by Voorhies and Morgan that once managers have determined which capability improvements will likely yield the greatest return, they should then communicate and discuss benchmarking findings within the firm to develop a common understanding, and further pursue a competitive advantage (Voorhies and Morgan, 2005).

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Sustainable consumption is defined as consumption that simultaneously optimizes the environmental, social, and economic consequences of acquisition, use and disposition in order to meet the needs of both current and future generations (Phipps, Ozanne, Luchs, Subrahmanyam, Kapitan, Catlin, Gau, Walker Naylor, Rose, Simpson and Weaver, 2012). Sustainable consumption has become a core objective recently in both national and international arenas, and one of the biggest factors of change for individual consumers is the notion for them to do their part in trying to save the planet by purchasing recycled goods and demanding ethically produced products from companies (Seyfang, 2006; Huang and Rust 2011). Sustainable consumption is globally desirable and important, but sometimes the positive attitudes of sustainability do not translate into sustainable consumption behaviors by consumers (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011; Phipps, Ozanne, Luchs, Subrahmanyam, Kapitan, Catlin, Gau, Walker Naylor, Rose, Simpson and Weaver, 2012).

Companies have responded to the heightened attention by bringing out new brand and product introductions in line with sustainable materials, and retailers have brought about comprehensive sustainability initiatives. In a research project by Ehr Gott, Reimann, Kaufmann, and Carter, it was found that socially sustainable supplier selection is a driving factor for a buying firm's reputation. Firms can influence their customer relationships by upholding social standards in its supplier selection process (Ehr Gott, Reimann, Kaufmann and Carter, 2011). Although companies are doing what they believe consumers are demanding, sales of sustainable products still represent only a small fraction of overall demand. According to Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, and Raghunathan, one study suggested that although 40% of consumers reported being willing to buy "green products," only 4% actually does. There are many potential reasons brought about for the low market share of sustainable products related to the high demand (Luchs, Walker Naylor, Irwin and Raghunathan, 2010).

Social Cognitive Theory suggests that consumers weigh the expected benefits of each decision versus the expected costs in order to determine which option provides the greatest value. Environmentally significant consumption behaviors, however, often differ in that the behavior involves making decisions based on outcomes that affect the environment and/or others, either directly or indirectly (Phipps, Ozanne, Luchs, Subrahmanyam, Kapitan, Catlin, Gau, Walker Naylor, Rose, Simpson and Weaver, 2012). Some other reasons for the lack of success of sustainable products include compromises in performance quality for green products combined with their limited availability and high price, ineffective marketing, and consumer distrust of green marketing, which is often perceived as deceptive or misleading (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011). Chouinard, Ellison, and Ridgeway suggest that the problem is that it is generally cheaper for consumers to buy the product that has a worse impact on the environment than the equivalent product that does less harm, so consumers are more willing to buy the cheaper product, especially with the recession. The ultimate goal for companies thus, is to get to the point where the lowest-priced product is also the product that does the least harm to the environment (Chouinard, Ellison and Ridgeway, 2011).

While personal ignorance about sustainable products as well as lack of sustainable products to choose from are each factors that may inhibit sustainable purchases, price seems to be the most important barrier of sustainable products. It was found that even when a consumer is able to afford sustainable products, there is oftentimes insufficient information to encourage them that the extra expense of the sustainable purchase is worth it. Results of a study by Vermeir and Verbeke indicated that the value of local sustainable products could be directly promoted by emphasizing personal relevance and importance to the individual (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2004).

Sustainable energy consumption is one thing that has moved to the center for the global environment and economy because of concerns about the effect of current systems of energy production, the growth of energy consumption, and the growing global competitive demand for energy resources. Four aspects of the market system constrain sustainable energy consumption, however. Among these four are policies and regulation, product accessibility and availability, pricing, and customer knowledge (Press and Arnould, 2009). The policy and regulation constraints include a lack of oversight in the sale of alternative power, the interplay between regional and national policy, national energy policy, and environmental policy issues. Availability and access are constraints due to the underdeveloped market for differentiated energy. Pricing constraints among consumers include the cost of generating more sustainable power at the residential level, and justifying the pricing of green energy because consumers can detect no difference in electricity at the point of consumption. The final constraint issue among energy consumption is knowledge, meaning that information regarding energy is confusing from the beginning because energy sources and management are not well understood (Press and Arnould, 2009).

Consumers are thought to be seeking to maximize their happiness through consumption, while businesses are seeking to maximize profits. Profits in business are based on revenues drawn from consumers, so the ultimate way for businesses to maximize their profits is to keep their customers happy (Huang and Rust, 2011). Happiness as defined in Huang and Rust's article is "quality of life or overall life satisfaction, which is the degree to which consumers judge the overall quality of their lives as a whole favorably." Happiness depends on many different things, but there are three major factors related to sustainability that impact consumers' happiness, including standard of living, psychic rewards emanating from environmentally responsible behavior, and charity toward poorer countries (Huang and Rust, 2011).

Overconsumption and *underconsumption* are also variables that lead to the level of consumer happiness (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011; Polonsky, 2011). Individuals who have large amounts of income and possessions tend to be less happy and have lower self-esteem, more anxiety, and poor social relationships. Overconsumption is both unproductive and unsustainable and is a problem for many consumers in the world. Underconsumption also serves as a problem for sustainable business marketing because underconsumption tends to come from countries of poverty, and thus is an un-servable market because they do not have the discretionary income to spend on the higher priced sustainable products (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011).

Sustainable Consumption in the Food Industry

The segment of consumers who consciously buy ethical or sustainable products, like organic, fair trade or animal friendly, is increasing, and like for any other marketable product, consumer acceptance is crucial for the success of sustainable products. A study by Vermeir and Verbeke found that young consumers are more highly involved in sustainable food consumption than any other sector. Sustainable food products are perceived by many consumers to be better with regard to taste, quality, safety, and freshness (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2004). If companies can make their products desirable, consumers will want to buy them, regardless of the possible higher price than a non-sustainable food product. Food organizations not built with sustainability values need to make the transition in their core ideology and change their organizational culture over time towards sustainability or they will no longer be successful in today's world (Crittenden, Crittenden, Ferrell, Ferrell and Pinney, 2011). Several food and beverage companies were founded on the production of organic and sustainable products, and have seen great success as a result. Such companies will be discussed later in the paper. As talked about earlier, sustainable products represent a small percentage of market share, and the organic foods industry resembles this completely, with organic foods accounting for less than 3% of all food sales in 2006 (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011).

Gail Feenstra, food systems analyst at the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program defines sustainable community food systems as "a collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies- one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place" (Feenstra, 2002). Some of the goals of sustainable community food systems are to have improved access by all community members to an adequate, nutritious diet, a stable base of family farms that use more sustainable production practices, marketing and processing practices that create more direct links between farmers and consumers, and improved working and living conditions for farm and other food system labor (Feenstra, 2002). If farmers and the community can learn to work together, it is possible to create these better living conditions for both parties and have a healthier ecosystem.

The increasing environmental degradation being experienced around the world is of serious concern, and in the future, environmental degradation will continue to act as a major constraint on future food production, contributing to reduced quantity, quality and affordability of food in many countries (Chabowski, Mena and Gonzalez-Padron, 2011; Bradbear, Catie and Friel, 2011). Direct contributors to this degradation include greenhouse gas emissions, water waste, biodiversity, and packaging and food waste. Environmental inputs such as land, water, and energy are used at all levels of food production including agricultural production, food processing and packaging, distribution, retail and consumption. It has been seen that fresh water supplies are diminishing, as half of the world's rivers are seriously depleted and polluted, harming food production. The agricultural sectors that are considered to be highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are the irrigated sheep, beef and grain producers, followed by the dry land sheep, beef and grain producers, and next some fisheries around the world (Bradbear, Catie and Friel, 2011). The degree to which consumers believe environmental issues are problematic is related to the disagreement between the causes, responses and timeframes in which remedial actions must be taken. In many cases, consumers put off looking for a solution to the problem, because they believe environmental problems are not something that needs to be worried about today, rather sometime in the future. They believe this because for environmental issues there is no fixed deadlines set in place and no media promotion inclining them to do something (Polonsky, 2011).

METHODS

There were two different methods of study used in this research project. First, a thorough literature review of 19 academic journal articles on sustainability was done to find out how sustainability is viewed academically. Articles came from a variety of different peer reviewed academic journals, including: five articles from the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, two articles from the Journal of Marketing, four articles from the Harvard Business Review, two articles from the Journal of Business Research, and one article each from the Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics, the Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, the Journal of Business Ethics, the Journal of Rural Studies, the Australian National University, and Agriculture and Human Values. The articles were read in chronological order according to the date it was published, to access how sustainability has evolved over time.

The second method of study for this research project included a website research of many different companies in the food industry to discover who utilizes the best practices of sustainability in the industry. The following section is a narrowed down list of the eight most sustainable food companies that were found, and will discuss each company's contribution to being environmentally friendly, as well as the types of products they offer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After reviewing many different company's websites, it was discovered that there are eight clear choice companies that utilize the best practices of sustainability in their production, and are fully committed to doing their best in keeping the environment clean. Most of the companies base their sustainable initiatives on the triple bottom line of sustainability by looking not only at economic impacts, but, also environmental and social impacts as well. Many of them also have sustainability in their DNA, meaning they were born utilizing sustainable practices rather than implementing them later, which allowed for their initial success. The following discussion will go into detail about each individual company, including the products they offer as well as the contributions they make in their production to being sustainable.

Grounds for Change

Grounds for Change is a family-owned and operated certified organic coffee roaster specializing in 100 percent Fair Trade Coffee, located in the Pacific Northwest. Fair Trade Coffee allows for a better standard of living for coffee bean farmers, guaranteeing them a fair price for their crop. Grounds for Change is committed to providing a sustainably, fairly produced product that benefits the environment, its farmers, and its consumers. The products they offer include organic, shade-grown, fair trade coffee, organic tea, and chocolate.

The company's mission is "to support social equity and environmental sustainability through fair trade, organic, shade-grown coffee" (Grounds for Change, 2012). They are achieving their environmental and sustainable goals by doing the following:

- Using 100 percent renewable energy for facilities
- Composting all of their organic waste including coffee grounds, coffee filters, and food scraps
- Purchasing and printing on paper made from 100 percent recycled content and recycle all of their office paper, toner cartridges, cardboard, glass, metal, and plastic
- Recycling all of their empty burlap coffee bags by donating them to local organic farmers for weed suppression and erosion control
- Recycling all of their coffee chaff, the organic by-product of the roasting process, by giving it to local organic farmers to be used as a nitrogen-rich soil amendment
- Recycling all inbound freight pallets by donating them to a local business that rebuilds them for reuse
- Donating well over 1 percent of their gross annual sales to social and environmental organizations
- Working closely with organizations promoting positive change

Frontier Natural Products

Frontier Natural Products is a member-owned co-op that specializes in natural and organic products. They pride themselves on their constant innovation practices, insight, and commitment to the highest standards in company performance, and that is what led them to the success they see today. Frontier Natural Products is USDA certified organic, uses 95 percent non-GMO (genetically modified organism) ingredients, and offers gluten-free products. They offset 100 percent of electrical energy with renewable energy credits, and offer carbon-neutral shipping. Their full line of products includes bulk herbs, spices and teas; dips dressings and seasonings; baking flavors and extracts; soups and pasta sauces; drink mixes; dried fruits and vegetables.

Frontier Natural Products utilizes the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit in their sustainable business actions. They consider, track and report the sustainability of every step of growing, buying, processing, packaging, and shipping of their products, along with the well-being of the people involved in each of those steps. They offer fair prices, and deal directly with growers whenever possible in order for them to get the maximum compensation for their products (Frontier Natural Products, 2012).

Numi Organic Tea

Numi Organic Tea is rooted in the principle of creating a healthful product that nurtures people and honors the planet. They strive to foster a healthy, thriving global community while bringing the purest, best-tasting organic tea to consumers. They are USDA certified organic and made with 100 percent herbs, fruits, flowers, and spices with no artificial flavorings or fragrances. They use fair trade-certified ingredients, and are Fair Labor Practices-certified. Numi Organic Tea's sustainable practices include using organic teas in their tea bags, eco-responsible packaging, and partnering with green partners to offset carbon emissions. They utilize a production facility powered by solar energy, purchase renewable energy credits to offset emissions from the supply chain, and uses no plastic shrink-wrap in their production. The outer packaging of their product is made from 85 percent post-consumer waste and

soy-based inks, and their tea bags are made from biodegradable filter paper. The products they offer include tea bags, loose leaf, iced and flowering teas (Numi Organic Tea, 2012).

Organic Valley

Organic Valley is a farmer-owned cooperative, founded in 1988 to support rural communities and protect the health of family farms through organic agriculture. They are USDA certified organic, do not use synthetic hormones, and use non-GMO ingredients. Organic Valley practices humane treatment of all animals, and builds stronger local economies by promoting family farms and locally produced food. Sustainable practices they utilize include researching and promoting on-farm renewable energy projects, and also a cooperative model of production allowing food to be sold closer to the farm where it was produced, thus requiring less energy to ship food long distances. They offer a wide variety of dairy products including milk, yogurt, butter and cheese, as well as eggs, juice, beef, chicken, pork, and turkey products.

The mission of the Cooperative Regions of Organic Producer Pools (CROPP) is “to create and operate a marketing cooperative that promotes regional farm diversity and economic stability by the means of organic agricultural methods and the sale of certified organic products.” Organic Valley also maintains the triple bottom line of sustainability in regards to social responsibility of how they affect their employees, customers, and the communities in which they operate, ecological integrity of how their operations affect the natural world and its resources, and economic stability of how they spend and save money. They were created with sustainability in their DNA, which is why they became so successful so fast, and they continue to pursue their goals and improve their sustainable practices (Organic Valley, 2012).

Lundberg Family Farms

Lundberg Family Farms is a family-owned and operated company that is committed to producing the finest quality rice and rice products for families, using eco-friendly farming methods. They are certified organic by the California Certified Organic Farmers, use non-GMO ingredients, and offer gluten-free products. Their sustainable practices include using energy conservation and renewable energy, providing safe and fair working conditions, and using recyclable materials in their packaging. They power 20 percent of their energy needs through solar energy and partner with Renewable Choice Energy in Colorado to install wind farms to offset conventional energy use. The products they offer include rice, rice cakes and chips, risotto, couscous, pasta, syrup, flour, and cereal.

Lundberg Family Farms is a mission-driven company that holds itself to a high standard in business, environmental stewardship, and the relationships it has with employees and business partners. Their mission is “to honor our family farming legacy by nourishing, conserving, and innovating for a healthier world” (Lundberg Family Farms, 2012).

Vital Choice Seafood

Vital Choice Seafood was founded by a fisherman with more than 20 years’ experience of wild fishing in Alaska, and offers customers sustainably harvested wild seafood products. It is a trusted source for fast home delivery of the world’s finest wild seafood and organic fare, harvested from healthy, well-managed wild fisheries and farms. All of their seafood products are free of antibiotics, pesticides, synthetic coloring agents and GMOs. Their sustainable commitment follows the triple bottom line and is as follows: “We are strongly committed to helping promote a sustainable social, ecological, and economic model for the harvesting and sale of wild salmon, and donate a portion of our profits to advocacy organizations such as the United Fisherman of Alaska.” They offset shipping emissions by financing the construction of renewable energy projects, and their CubeCycle program allows for recycling of EPS foam shipping containers. Their product line includes wild-harvested salmon, white fish, shellfish, canned seafood, smoked fish, omega-3 supplements, organic nuts, dried fruits, oils, vinegars, dark chocolate, seasonings, and tea, and their products are strictly sold online (Vital Choice Seafood, 2012).

Nature’s Path Foods

Nature’s Path Foods is a “fiercely independent” family company that is committed to using quality ingredients to make healthy, vegetarian and vegan foods that contain a wide variety of whole grains. They aspire to advance the cause of people and planet, along the path to sustainability. They were born with sustainability in their DNA, growing organic, healthy foods in a sustainable way from the beginning. They offer a variety of gluten-free items, and use non-GMO ingredients. Their product line includes organic granola, cereals, breakfast bars, frozen breakfasts, baking mixes and sprouted grain breads (Nature’s Path Foods, 2012).

Nature's Path Foods' sustainable contributions include a near-zero-waste headquarters rooftop garden, rainwater-harvesting system, and an on-site composting facility. They also buy non-organic land in order to convert it into organic farms. Some of the sustainable accomplishments are as follows:

- Diverting 92 percent of their waste from landfills
- Reducing the use of electricity, paperboard, and CO₂ per pound of product shipped
- Empowering employees to take ownership of sustainability and green initiative through Self Directed Work Teams
- Launching their 'Bite4Bite' program with a \$1 million commitment to North American food banks
- Donating \$2 million in cash and food to the hungry
- Keeping 204,000 lbs. of chemical pesticides out of the soil

Clif Bar and Company

Clif Bar and Company is committed to five key aspirations, including sustaining the planet by keeping their impact on the environment small, sustaining the community by giving back, sustaining their people by creating a workplace where people can live life to its fullest, sustaining their business by growing slower and better and sticking around longer, and sustaining their brands by making what people actually need and never compromising quality. They use nutritious ingredients combined carefully to create useful foods that nourish, energize, hydrate or provide an excellent source of fiber or protein for consumers. The products they offer include a wide range of nutritious energy bars, protein bites, drink mixes, children's fruit snacks, and energy chews and gels.

Clif Bar and Company uses approximately 70 percent organic ingredients, and their corporate mission is to reduce their carbon footprint and build a supply chain that connects more directly with farmers. They are working to create healthier, more sustainable communities everyday by sourcing organic ingredients and supporting organic agriculture, engaging the people who grow, make package, transport and eat their food, partnering and collaborating with innovative people and organizations, and encouraging hands-on volunteer service (Clif Bar and Company, 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

Sustainability can be defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and is prevalent in all areas of business today. The triple bottom line of sustainability needs to be implemented in companies if they want to survive in today's market. Many companies in the food industry are well ahead of the game and have already implemented sustainability initiatives. The eight companies listed in this paper all utilize best practices of sustainability in their everyday functions. Most of them were born with sustainability in their DNA right away. All businesses, no matter what industry they may be operating in, need to understand the importance of sustainability and find ways to utilize the best sustainable practices in order to keep consumers coming back to them.

LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations of this research project. First of all, there are hundreds of journal articles relating to the topic of sustainability, and due to time constraints, not all of the information could be implemented into the research paper. There are also numerous companies in the food industry that utilize best practices of sustainability, but again, time constraints limit the number that were able to be accessed. Future studies might look into how sustainability affects other food companies, and possibly look into how restaurants are meeting the sustainable demands of consumers.

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