

Sustainability – Challenge or Opportunity for the Food Manufacturing Sector?

Sustainability is not a new concept, in fact back in 1907 it was used as a legal term, and the concept was introduced as a term in relation to agriculture, economy and nature in the highly publicized report "Limits to Growth" in 1972.

Brundtland Report of 1987 made the concept more common by saying that "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Later concepts such as the "triple bottom line" and "People, Planet & Profit" have been introduced to define sustainability strategies.



These days sustainability is mentioned all across the world and within most business activities and media. Larger companies have sustainability strategies and targets such as Unilever who back in autumn 2015 stated that "**100% of our agricultural raw materials will be sourced sustainable by 2020**" and thousands of sustainability reports are issued each year by companies and organizations of all sizes.

Recent analyzes have shown that it is not the extent of sustainability reports - but more the individual activities and objectives that matter to how companies and organizations can act in line with the recommendations of Brundtland report.



Looking at sustainability in relation to the food industry it may be useful to relate this to the "People, Planet & Profit" philosophy, in terms of social responsibility, environmental protection and economic viability as focus areas.

These are areas with which many food manufacturing companies have been working with for many years in order to ensure the right competences, high level of food safety and environmental protection.

The connection between activities within the food supply chain and “People, Planet & Profit” is shown in the matrix below.

	People	Planet	Profit
Supplier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Safety • Social/welfare • Contract and wages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with environmental limits • Endangered species of plants or animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub suppliers • Contracts • Transport
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Safety • Sickness and absence • Competences and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource utilisation • Minimisation and/or reuse of waste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimisation of product waste • Quality management
Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer and consumer requirements • Purchasing power and financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and packaging • Transport and distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferred supplier • Product differentiation

There appear to be a clear pattern of how many of the above mentioned sustainability activities already included in the companies' current focus, for example. in HR, quality, environmental and safety management, procurement and other functions.



Being able to work towards sustainable development is not necessarily a matter of developing new initiatives, but just as much having a systematic approach towards better understanding and optimization of existing processes and activities across the organization, and for these activities to support each other.

The result of such systematic approach for your company could be:

- Strengthening the overview of your supply chain,
- Improving your relationship with your key customers and suppliers,
- Expanding your quality and environmental system to also integrate sustainability and
- Differentiating your brand product / services and company from other manufactures in the market.

Therefore let sustainability be the opportunity for the development of your business.

