

# Staking a sustainability claim

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CHICAGO – Plant-based foods are here to stay, and they’ve changed the food market for the better,” said Christian Flinn, policy associate with the Plant Based Foods Association, San Francisco, at the Bridge2Food Plant & Protein Summit Americas in Chicago on May 11-12. “Plant-based foods have the potential to feed more people with much less negative impact on the planet, animals and humans.”

The key word is “potential,” and right now the industry is in flux as consumers question the perceived over-processing of plants into value-added foods and the finished product’s nutritional quality. Numerous studies show most consumers want to include more plant-based foods in their diet. Going forward, value-added plant-based foods may need to provide more than a plant-based claim to attract shoppers.

## Establishing quantifiable claims

“Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges of our time, and consumers want to take action by purchasing more sustainable products to address this issue,” said Neil Pollock, senior manager of sustainability solutions, Fonterra, Auckland, New Zealand. “There are

opportunities for brands to leverage climate claims to show how their brand meets the needs of the conscious consumer to justify price premiums and improve brand preference.”

Evol, a brand of Conagra Brands Inc., Chicago, that manufactures single-serve meals in bowl and burrito applications, is taking a step toward protecting the environment by introducing Carbonfree Certified Carbon Neutral single-serve frozen meals. The line includes vegan and plant-forward options, such as butternut squash sage ravioli and portabella goat cheese ravioli, as well as meat-based dishes.

“Evol’s philosophy has always been rooted in making great-tasting food while doing what’s right,” said Jill Dexter, vice president and general manager. “Evol measures the carbon footprint of the products over their full lifecycle, cradle-to-grave — from ingredient sourcing and packaging, to product manufacturing, distribution and consumer use and end of life — and invests in projects that remove an equal amount of carbon from the atmosphere.”

## **Eliminating food waste**

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Reducing food waste is another quantifiable means to market plant-based foods. One way to do that is to turn waste into food through upcycling.

Nearly 2.5 billion tons of food are wasted each year globally, generating 10% of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions, according to the report “Driven to waste” by the World Wildlife Fund. From the water used to grow and produce food that doesn’t get consumed, to the greenhouse gases emitted when food decomposes in landfills, food waste profoundly affects the environment. Plant-based food marketers can help reduce this waste.

“Cutting food waste is the single-most effective thing companies and people can do to address climate change,” said Turner Wyatt, co-founder and chief executive officer, Upcycled Food Association (UFA), Greenwood Village, Colo.

Del Monte Foods Inc., Walnut Creek, Calif., redirects about 130,000 lbs of pineapple juice each year to make its Gut Love and Boost Me Fruit Infusions fruit snack cups. The UFA recently certified the products. Last year, the company received the same third-party certification for two varieties of canned green beans sourced from 100% upcycled and sustainably grown green beans from Wisconsin and Illinois.

“Food that is produced but never eaten still requires enormous resources to grow, harvest, transport and prepare,” said Molly Laverty, environmental, social and governance senior manager at Del Monte Foods. “Producing and choosing upcycled products and ingredients is important in the fight against food waste.”

Field and Farmer started as an indoor urban farm in Chicago focused on greens and herbs. To reduce waste, the company started using leftover basil to make salad dressing that quickly became a hit. Field and Farmer now offers a range of products made from plants sourced from independent farmers and prioritizes working with local farmers who incorporate

practices to help protect the planet. Imperfect produce makes up about 40% of its supply chain. On its way to becoming a Certified B Corporation, the company runs the manufacturing facility as a zero-waste plant and composts or donates the produce that cannot be used.

“We communicate to our customers that every time you purchase a Field and Farmer dip, dressing, juice or snack bar, you are supporting a farm,” said Isabella Chia, senior vice president of marketing. “Last year, nearly half of all the produce that went into our products was local to our facility, and we routinely donate to organizations that support farmers.”



Ocean Spray Cranberries Inc., Lakeville-Middleboro, Mass., and Atlantic Sea Farms, Saco, Maine, are working together to manufacture cranberry kelp cubes, which combine two ingredients grown using regenerative farming practices. The cubes are made with three ingredients: kelp puree, cranberry puree and cranberry seeds. Cranberry seeds are a new upcycled ingredient.

Count carrot juice processing as another opportunity for upcycling. Up to 80% of the weight in the processing is pulp leftover, a waste byproduct often used as compost, said Beth Kennedy, who co-founded Seconds and now serves as CEO of the New York-based company that uses the pulp leftover in crackers.

“The flavor is actually pretty mild,” Ms. Kennedy said of the upcycled carrot ingredients. “That gives it a good base to be able to develop multiple flavors of crackers. Also, carrots are approachable. They are a really approachable vegetable that a lot of people like and are familiar with.”

Tapioca flour is listed first on the cracker’s ingredient panel. Seeds in the crackers include flax, chia, sunflower, black sesame, white sesame and poppy. Minced garlic, minced toasted onion, sea salt and ground turmeric add flavor. Last year Seconds partnered with Renewal Mill, an upcycled food company, to incorporate upcycled oat milk into the crackers. Seconds in the future may incorporate other upcycled vegetables into its products.

“Bringing in that upcycled oat milk flour really helped us to perfect that crunch and allowed us to increase the amount of upcycled ingredients that we have in our product,” Ms. Kennedy said. “What we’re trying to do is build this brand that features upcycled ingredients as the heroes. We started with carrots, and now we have oat milk flour. As many upcycled ingredients that we can bring in is what we want to do.”

Simple Mills, Chicago, uses its packages to communicate all the “good” that goes into making its plant-based products. One of the brand’s newest concepts is Seed and Nut Flour Sweet Thins. They are made from a mix of nutrient-dense ingredients, with the flour blend based on watermelon, flax and sunflower seeds, and cashews. Watermelon seeds are an upcycled ingredient from the manufacture of watermelon juice.



“We chose watermelon seed flour as the leading ingredient in our flour blend because it helps create a deliciously light and crispy texture and brings protein, good fats and micronutrients,” said Katlin Smith, founder. “If that wasn’t enough, watermelon seed introduces greater crop diversity, which is a key principle of regenerative agriculture.”

San Francisco-based Renewal Mill is all about upcycled ingredients. The company converts the pulpy leftovers of soy and oat milk production into gluten-free flours that boost the fiber and protein content in a variety of consumer packaged goods. The most recent innovation is a vegan salted peanut butter cookie developed in partnership with Miyoko’s Creamery, Petaluma, Calif. It is made with okara flour and Miyoko’s European-style cultured vegan butter.

The upcycled soy ingredient is referred to as okara flour. It is an ingredient with a neutral flavor, which is described as slightly milky or nutty. It has a light color allowing it to blend easily into most flour-based products, said Claire Schlemme, co-founder and CEO.

ReGrained, San Francisco, developed a patented technology to repurpose spent grains produced by beer brewers and process them in a way that makes them stable as a food ingredient. ReGrained’s first certified upcycled ingredient is ReGrained SuperGrain. It has a toasted appearance, flavor and aroma. The company started making a line of ReGrained bars with the ingredient and now offers snack puffs, pasta and baking mixes. The flour provides a minimum of three-and-a-half times the dietary fiber and double the plant protein of whole grain flour, as well as prebiotics, according to the company. The company makes the quantifiable claim of “each pouch saving 60 to 100 gallons of water.”

“People are increasingly aware that their product choices have an impact on the environment,” said Dan Kurzrock, founder and CEO. “And it can be very overwhelming. But when it comes to reducing food waste, this is something that people can take immediate action and see results. Choosing upcycled foods empowers them to go one big step further.”

The Plant Based Foods Association offers a domestic sourcing initiative to connect plant-based food companies with domestic supply network partners, such as farmers, processors, ingredient suppliers and manufacturers. It creates collaborative opportunities for farmers and rural communities, all messaging that may be communicated to shoppers.

“By sourcing key ingredients domestically, producers can build stronger, more resilient networks to support their growth and stability that are not subject to long-distance shipping and transportation issues,” Mr. Flinn said. “As the plant-based market grows, farmers will see new opportunities and demands arise. Creating these opportunities ensures crop diversification and promotes sustainability while ensuring that agriculture remains profitable.”

The plant-based foods industry will continue to evolve to better enable consumers to “shop their values.” Shelley Balanko, senior vice president, The Hartman Group Inc., Bellevue, Wash., said that this is a place plant-based food marketers can connect with consumers.

### Plant-based Sustainability

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