

# Soup-To-Nuts Podcast: More consumers consider sustainability as more than ‘simply saving the earth’

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During the Consumer Brands Association’s inaugural session of its new leadership education series, CPG Speaks, General Mills CEO Jeff Harmening this week told the food and beverage industry that if it wants to maintain the consumer engagement and sales that have surged since the outbreak began then it cannot drop the ball on sustainability or innovation while simultaneously executing against the day-to-day demands of the pandemic.



Indeed, the consumer research firm The Hartman Group noted in a recent blog post that current events, including the pandemic and anti-racism movement, have pushed many consumers to reflect more closely on their values and those of the companies they support – elevating the already heightened importance of sustainability. But, The Hartman Group notes, ‘sustainability’ isn’t limited to the planet. It also includes “*behaving responsibly towards workers, communities and the environment*,” according to its Sustainability 2019 Beyond Business as Usual report.

Answering this call to action, ingredient supplier Tate & Lyle recently announced ambitious new environmental targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, eliminate coal from its operations, reduce water use and waste while simultaneously creating new opportunities for and improving the lives of the farmers with whom it partners. In this episode of FoodNavigator-USA’s Soup-To-Nuts podcast, Tate & Lyle director of sustainability Anna Pierce walks us through these ambitious goals, discusses the importance of partnerships to improve sustainability and shares why it vital that industry expand its definition of sustainability to align with consumer perceptions of it.

**[Editor’s Note: Never miss another episode of FoodNavigator-USA’s Soup-To-Nuts podcast – subscribe on iTunes .]**

## Meeting the evolving definition of ‘sustainability’

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According to The Hartman Group, consumers' definition of sustainability has evolved over the years from *"simply saving the earth"* in 2007 to become by 2019 *"shorthand for a complete moral system of cultural values, beliefs and attitudes related to a sense of responsibility for the greater good"* for generations to come.

According to Pierce, Tate & Lyle's purpose of *"improving lives for generations"* reflects this evolution, as does the three pillars that support its mission, which include helping people choose healthier foods and beverages, supporting its employees and community and caring for the planet.

*"Tate & Lyle is on a journey as a purpose driven organization. The purpose is improve lives for generations. ... It's very difficult to say that you're improving lives for generations if you're not thinking about your environmental footprint,"* she said.

Similarly, it is hard to improve lives for generations if employees and the communities that they are living and working in are not supported, which is why all of these elements must come together to be addressed as sustainability.

When evaluating how best to meet these goals, Pierce said, Tate & Lyle asks if in 10 years, when it looks back at what it has achieved, will it feel like it has done enough.

*"If the answer wasn't yes, then it was time to go back, and continue to refine"* our goals, Pierce said.

To set goals that could pass this gut-check, Tate & Lyle reviewed and updated its emissions inventory to create three scopes of work – the first two of which focused internally on how Tate & Lyle could create change and the third calls on its entire supply chain to participate and improve operations.

Within the first two scopes, Tate & Lyle aims to reduce absolute emissions by 30% by 2030 with a midpoint of 20% by 2025 and a 15% absolute reduction in emissions within supply chain in scope three.

Part of the company's plan to achieve this is by eliminating the use of coal from its operation by 2025.

For the first time, Tate & Lyle also set a goal to reduce water use by 15% by 2030, which Pierce says will require the company to rethink its operations and make being more environmentally conscious part of the way it does business.

Finally, Tate & Lyle has committed to becoming a zero-waste company by 2030 and to redirecting 75% of waste to useful means by 2025. While ambitious, Pierce said, the company has already made strides with facilities that already are zero-waste.

## Partnerships are key to long-term, far-reaching success

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Even though much of Tate & Lyle's efforts are internally focused, it recognizes that to make real change it could not tackle the problems hindering sustainability alone, which is why it has partnered with players across its entire value chain.

For example, Tate & Lyle teamed with Truterra, which was formerly Land O'Lakes SUSTAIN, to help Midwest corn farmers understand the impact of sustainable practices not just on their crops and the earth, but also their bottom lines.

The partnership with Truterra is far from the only one that Tate & Lyle has forged when it comes to improving sustainability. Late last year it also joined with its stevia partner Sweet Green Fields and the environmentally focused non-profit Earthwatch to assess the sustainability of the stevia sweetener supply chain – a move that Pierce said was a *“next natural choice.”*

A key element on which Pierce says the success of these programs will hinge, and which she says all food & beverage companies should consider as they evaluate their environmental impact, is the ability to look at sustainability from a holistic view and incorporating the needs of all stakeholders, rather than dictating overly prescriptive programs or taking a micro view of only one problem at a time.

*“Are we asking the farmer to do something more than what we ourselves would do?”* she asked, noting that *“very prescriptive programs have some shortcomings”* and programs that are developed with all stakeholders are more effective and benefit more people.

Likewise, she said, the food and beverage industry along with the broader agricultural industry will progress more quickly if they share best practices and are transparent in their successes and shortcomings.

Finally, she said, for those who don't know where to begin on their sustainability journey, they should know first and foremost they are not alone.

*“For every single one of us, there is another stakeholder, whether it be NGOs, nonprofits, government agencies, universities – that are all working on the same thing,”* she said. *“I see a lot of opportunity where we really look to pull groups of people together that have a similar interest to advance sustainability at large. That's where you really see the impact.”*

But before stakeholders can share best practices or move the needle on sustainability, Pierce said they need to set concrete goals and get buy-in from the top to ensure there is a coordinated effort and accountability.

**Editor's Note: If you are interested in discovering how stakeholders across the industry are improving sustainability, join FoodNavigator-USA Aug. 6 at 12 CT for our Unlocking Innovation: Sustainability in Focus webinar. Register for FREE [here](#) .]**