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Hannaford Supermarkets: Stewardship & Innovation

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Hannaford Supermarkets: Stewardship & Innovation

In thinking about climate change as it relates to the food system, often the conversation is focused on impacts at the farm level. It is important to remember that the value chain in the food industry is more expansive and includes numerous actors, such as processors, distributors, retailers, and manufacturers. One actor is the supermarket chain Hannaford Supermarkets of Delhaize America, renowned in the Northeast for its strong commitment to environmental stewardship, employee engagement, and local communities.

Background

Hannaford Supermarkets is a grocery chain based in Scarborough, Maine. Hannaford is a Delhaize America company and is owned by the Belgian based Delhaize Group. Founded in Portland, Maine in 1883, Hannaford has since grown to over 180 stores in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and New York (1).

Sustainability

Sustainability is at the crux of Hannaford's business model. The company strongly believes that "it's about being responsible for our future, it's about being responsible for our world" (1). Hannaford is a leader in the field, spearheading novel initiatives to minimize resource consumption. For example, the company installed iceless seafood cases, which reduce water consumption by 100,000 gallons per store annually. This year, Hannaford became the first grocery store chain in the nation to earn the coveted 'Grocery Stewardship Certification' with Manomet. A



FIGURE 1: Hannaford became the first grocery store chain in the nation to earn the coveted 'Grocery Steward Certification'.

store in Augusta, Maine was the first supermarket in the nation to receive a LEED Platinum certification by the U.S. Green Building Council, the highest ranking in energy and environmental design.

Zero Waste Program

While sustainability initiatives abound at Hannaford, the company's zero waste program has been its most influential. In the fall of 2011, Hannaford began a pilot program focused on waste reduction. The initial draw was a desire to build a more robust recycling program and increase savings by reducing the dollars spent on waste removal. In addition to food waste, which contributes to 30% of total waste, the zero waste program focuses on recycling paper, cardboard, stretch, and film plastic. Within the first year, the program saw a 30% reduction in total waste volume and \$1,000,000 in savings (2). After an exceptionally successful pilot, the program was expanded to all Hannaford stores in the following year.

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FIGURE 2: Hannaford is a leader in the field, spearheading novel initiatives to minimize resource consumption, such as iceless seafood cases.

Honing in on Food Waste

Since food waste amounts to 30% of total waste at Hannaford, the zero waste program places a notable emphasis on reducing food waste. Hannaford’s food waste reduction strategy is rooted in the ‘Food Recovery Hierarchy’ outlined by the Environmental Protection Agency (3). The hierarchy prioritizes actions that organizations can take to prevent and divert food waste. The most preferred method is source reduction, or reducing the volume of surplus food generated. Next is feeding community members in need by donating the extra food, followed by feeding animals, using byproducts for industrial uses, and composting. At the very bottom lies the least preferred resort, which is sending waste to landfill and incineration. “That is our philosophy

when it comes to food waste,” says Kasey Harris, Sustainability Programs Specialist at Hannaford.

Roused by this philosophy, Hannaford exerts its efforts on the first two actions. The company targets source reduction through improvements in logistics management. Previously, when placing orders, department managers projected sales volumes. Now, deliveries occur every day of the week. The company also transitioned to a computer assisted ordering program that tracks each item. In this way, Hannaford is operating with greater efficiency by reducing faulty projections and stocking errors.

The second priority is donating surplus food to hunger relief agencies. Through a robust partnership with Feeding America, almost every Hannaford store is able to donate to a local food pantry, which means minimal edible food is thrown away. By rooting their food waste reduction strategy in the philosophy of the ‘Food Recovery Hierarchy’, Hannaford has built a logical, valuable, and impactful model.

Recommendations

For other companies and organizations interested in implementing a zero waste program, Hannaford’s model is an exemplar. Kasey offers her advice, “Keep it simple, have measurable targets, two to three goals with two to three measurements, and make sure you’re engaging the larger group.” That, in fact, is the gist of the program. Implementing

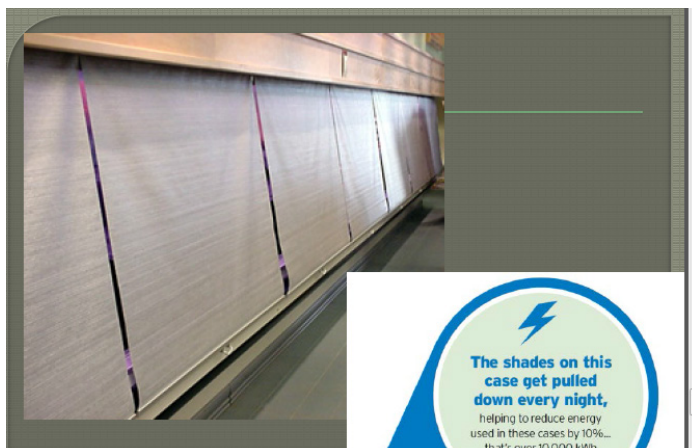


FIGURE 3: A common sense, but impactful, initiative pulls the shades down on cases each night, reducing energy use in cases by 10% (3).

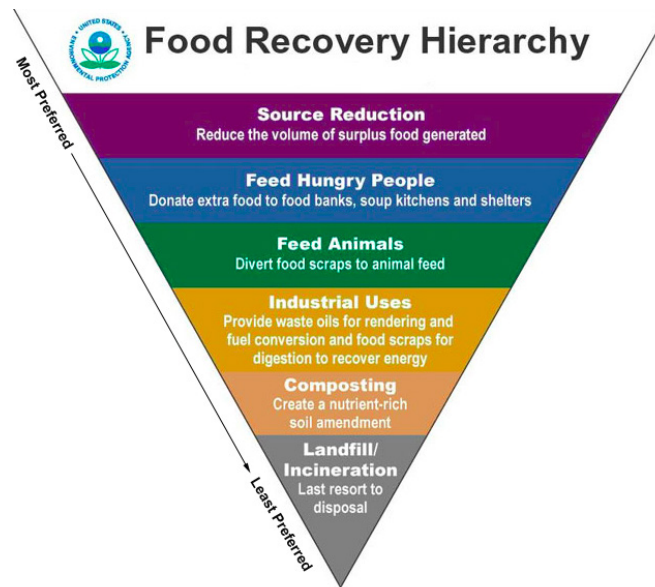


FIGURE 4: The zero waste program is rooted in the philosophy of the ‘Food Recovery Hierarchy’. Hannaford exerts its efforts on the first two preferences: source reduction and feeding people (3).

a zero waste program has a lot of moving pieces, but the simplicity of the program is essential to its success.

In designing the program, Hannaford was acutely aware that metrics were essential to determine the program’s efficacy. The company had two measures: sales per store and tons of waste per store. Normalizing these numbers allowed the company to quantify success through a single metric: pounds of waste generated per \$1000 in sales per store. Based on the sole metric, the stores were ranked on two indicators: how they fared within the district and how they fared in comparison to the Hannaford average. The metric was a game-changer. “Once the associates had an idea of what they needed to do, they also needed to know how they were doing,” states Kasey.

Another crucial piece of the program is employee engagement. Employees, or associates, in Hannaford language, are integral to the program’s design. Hannaford’s leadership recognized that the success of the program was contingent on associates owning parts of the program. A sustainability lead was identified in each store, trained on program specifics, and led the charge of leading a sustainability team at each store. Through this model, the associates became champions of the program. “We found that when the associates had something bigger than themselves, than Hannaford, to rally around, that gave them additional energy, interest,

and commitment to its success,” says Kasey.

Challenges

A big challenge is keeping the program at the forefront of people’s minds. Since the program has been in place for a couple years, maintaining the same momentum can be demanding. Another challenge comes with the incremental nature of the program. At the onset of the program, the associates wanted to recycle everything in the store, but some minor products, like certain plastic items and plastic bands, had no recycling outlets. Keeping the associates engaged without waning their enthusiasm is an important balancing act.

Identified Needs and Opportunities

The food waste ban in Massachusetts went into effect last fall, but talks of the ban began as early as 2006. “We wanted to be on the forefront of this,” says Kasey, thinking back to the time. The impending ban catalyzed the zero waste program, with its strong focus on food waste. In this way, policies and legislations, and the desire to be ahead of them, can be a strong force in the implementation of sustainability measures.

Since Hannaford spans across five states, state-specific legislation poses a challenge. An example is the Vermont legislation requiring labeling of genetically modified food. “Things passed at the state or local

level can be more difficult to manage versus a regional approach,” states Kasey. As conversations in food systems shift from a local to a regional scale, there needs to be parallel shift towards regionally focused policies that can have greater leverage and greater impact.

References:

1. Hannaford. <http://www.hannaford.com/>. Accessed on August 1, 2015.
2. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery. 2013. “Case Study: Hannaford Supermarkets Move Towards Zero Waste.” EPA 530-F-13-001.
3. Environmental Protection Agency. “The Food Recovery Hierarchy.” <http://www.epa.gov/foodrecovery/> Accessed on August 1, 2015.



FIGURE 5: Associates, or employees in Hannaford language, were key to the success of the program. Giving associates ownership over the program gave them the momentum, knowledge, and initiative to become champions of the program.

Climate Change and the New England Food System Case Study Series

This briefing was researched and written by the UNH Sustainability Institute’s 2015 Climate Fellow, Ravdeep Jaidka. Ravdeep’s fellowship focused on documenting and communicating climate impacts and adaptation strategies for New England farmers and fishermen. Ravdeep graduated from the Agriculture, Food, and Environment Master’s program from Tufts University this May. She is currently the Supply Chain Coordinator at Equal Exchange, importing fair trade bananas from small producer groups in Latin America. The fellowship was based at the Sustainability Institute and hosted in collaboration with Food Solutions New England (FSNE). FSNE is a regional, collaborative network organized around a single goal: to transform the New England food system into a resilient driver of racial equity and food justice, health, sustainable farming and fishing, and thriving communities. Learn more at www.foodsolutionsne.org.

