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California Giant Berry Farms introduces sustainability initiative

January 7, 2019

With ever-changing industry trends, food forecasting and technology advancements, there is a topic that is also trending as the new year rolls in: sustainability.



Eric Valenzuela The conversation of sustainability began at California Giant Berry Farms a year ago when they met with Nikki Rodoni, chief executive officer of Measure to Improve.

Measure to Improve's vision is to assist companies in the produce industry by providing tools, benchmarks and guidance in documenting successes as they work towards sustainability and ultimately translating economic and environmental benefits between sellers and buyers. The

consulting group is guiding California Giant's sustainability initiative to increase efficiencies, increase profitability, reduce costs, and engage employees as they take a proactive approach throughout the project in three key areas.

The company's initiatives include an on-farm sustainability program with long-time strawberry grower, Rich Uto to develop a how-to guide for their entire farming community, an energy efficiency project at their cooling facilities, and a zero-waste program at their headquarters. Acknowledging this community effort needed to achieve sustainability goals, the company plans to incentivize its employees during routine benchmarks and progress assessments as they continue to collectively strive toward becoming a Zero Waste company.

"This is a path we see the industry as a whole is taking, and it's one we are proud to be involved in," explained Nick Chappell, director of retail sales for California Giant Berry Farms. "When we heard from some of our key customers that increased on-farm sustainability and social accountability was something they wanted to see more of from their top berry suppliers — we listened and got to work. But not only that, we were eager to pave our own unique sustainability path with MTI", added Chappell.



Nick Chappell

The berry company is focused on providing their trading partners and the consumer three key pillars of sustainability: People, Planet, and Profit. For an agricultural system to be truly sustainable, it must be environmentally sound (Planet), economically viable (Profit), and socially equitable (People). California Giant's mission is to hone in on these three P's and ensure all aspects of sustainable agriculture are being served with intent and attention to better serve their customers and the community.

The process of ensuring on-farm, in-office and cooler facility sustainability initiatives is not an easy task, and it's one that requires involvement and participation from every California Giant employee. With that, the company quickly earned itself a leader and driving force in sustainability, Eric Valenzuela, food safety manager at California Giant Berry Farms and founder of the company's internal 'Green Team'.

“It’s not necessarily about ‘being green’, it’s about being smart,” said Valenzuela, “It’s about ensuring our employees are happy, ensuring we’re producing the best berries as efficiently as we can, and protecting our planet and future generations. We have started this sustainability journey and it’s up to us to follow through and pave the way for others in the industry. We want to be better at being sustainable, not just in one category — but every category.”

California Giant’s ‘Green Team’ consists of various employees from diverse departments. Each member is responsible for representing the company’s sustainability efforts by meeting monthly to discuss progress, data and findings, and improvement for the future. Their duties in-office are to serve as advocates to educate and encourage employees on recycling, their zero-waste program, and their Measure to Improve story.

“Giving back to our community is part of the California Giant mission — it’s what we do on a year-round basis through various philanthropic endeavors,” said Valenzuela. “This is just another way we plan to give back to our communities. We strive to deliver quality berries, food-safe berries, and sustainable berries by using less water, energy and resources, while producing the same flavor and freshness our customers can count on.”

California Giant Berry Farms has set a goal of becoming fully sustainable by the end of 2019.

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