

Striving to Do Good Despite Adversity

Food insecurity and labor policies propelled CSR efforts in 2020

The pandemic and growing attention to social inequality presented opportunities to address important corporate social responsibility (CSR) topics, such as a growing hunger crisis and the critical role of food industry workers, in an unprecedented environment. Leaders throughout

food production addressed these issues head-on and shared progress on the steps they have taken. Last year, The Intel Distillery tracked an escalation of purpose-driven efforts, new partnerships and top-down moves that defined how food brands are looking to the future.

Purpose-driven Efforts

In 2020, food brands used their power to translate purpose into action.

- Global animal health leader Zoetis [partnered](#) with food banks across the United States to provide sorely needed fresh dairy, meat and poultry products. In addition, Zoetis provided monetary support and much-needed cold storage units to better equip food pantries.
- Startup snack bar brand Bunch Bar [believed](#) that great tasting food should be available to everyone, especially food-insecure, inner-city youth. With giving back integrated into its sales model, the brand launched in 2020, delivering on its mission with each purchase.
- In October, Chobani [announced](#) plans to increase its starting hourly wage to \$15, which is set to take effect in early 2021. CEO Hamdi Ulukaya told Fortune that the pandemic provided “an opportunity to see things a lot deeper and say, ‘These are fundamentals that need to change.’”
- Seeing equality in education as a game-changer, Hormel Foods Corporation [offered](#) two-year college degree programs to dependents of its employees, beginning in 2021.
- Food companies responded to racial inequality by committing to redesign packaging and branding; [Aunt Jemima](#), [Mrs. Butterworth’s](#), [Uncle Ben’s](#) and [Cream of Wheat](#) were among the first to announce changes.



New Partnerships

There is power in working together to address common causes. Many brands formed new partnerships to find common ground on the environment and form alliances across a range of supply chain stakeholders.

- Chicagoland Food & Beverage Network [launched](#) Bigger Table to connect food industry partners and unlock new charitable initiatives to provide assistance where it is needed most (Food Business News).
- In July, Meat+Poultry [reported](#) that Burger King, Cargill, Inc., and the WWF would reseed and replant 8,000 acres of “marginal cropland” in Montana and South Dakota with ecologically diverse plants for cattle grazing.



- Food Navigator [reported](#) on June 24 that PepsiCo-owned Quaker Oats and pure-play agriculture company Corteva Agriscience partnered to produce the first-ever sequencing of the full oat genome.
- In November, coalition-based Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance (FACA) [issued](#) its first climate policy recommendations, which was possible with the cooperation between the American Farm Bureau Federation, National Farmers Union and National Coalition of Farmer Cooperatives, effectively representing producers of all sizes and political persuasions.

Corporate Leadership Moves

Events of 2020 challenged food industry executives to reexamine their entire supply chains as well as conventional business practices. Real change happens at the top, and these examples hint at more changes to come.

- In December, Tyson Foods, Inc., [hired](#) Dr. Claudia Coplein as its chief medical officer to lead the “company’s efforts to protect team members during the COVID-19 pandemic, while also working to expand and promote a culture of health, safety and wellness at Tyson.”
- The Kroger Co. [unveiled](#) a “Framework for Action” that promotes diversity and inclusion not only from within its workforce but also among the communities served by its 2,800 stores nationwide (Supermarket News).
- McDonald’s Corporation [expanded](#) a leadership role to be held by Reginald J. Miller, who will serve as vice president and global chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer.
- In the next five years, PepsiCo [said](#), it will increase representation of women and minority employees within its workforce, specifically in management roles (Food Dive).



With all the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic and social unrest in 2020, food companies showed resilience and strived to be a positive force for change. While hunger and labor policies required immediate action, progress on other important sustainability pillars continued. In the months and years ahead, look for leaders to expand the definition of corporate citizenship as companies support their communities and the world at large.



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