



QUICK START GUIDE:

INCREASE

★ THE SUSTAINABILITY OF YOUR ★

Organic Business

Oregon Tilth's Quick Start Guide series is designed to provide all of the basics necessary to jump right in and get started on certification-related actions immediately.

INCREASE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF YOUR ORGANIC BUSINESS



As a certified organic business, you already have a leg up when it comes to sustainability. But what does sustainability mean? What is sustainable about being an organic business, and how can you continue to deepen your commitment to sustainability? This Quick Start Guide for Building a Sustainable Business is intended to ask (and answer) big questions as well as provide you with resources and tools to use when starting the process on your own.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS & GUIDELINES:

**THE SFTA
DECLARATION OF
SUSTAINABILITY**

**SUMMARY OF
SFTA'S ELEVEN
INDICATORS OF
SUSTAINABILITY**

**QUICK CASE
STUDIES**

**THE
RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN
SUSTAINABILITY +
TRANSPARENCY**

**ADDITIONAL
RESOURCES**

LET'S GET STARTED!



THE SFTA DECLARATION OF SUSTAINABILITY



As growers, processors, handlers, brokers, distributors and retailers in the organic food trade, the SFTA understands that many are deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale and speed of environmental pollution and degradation, climate change, and depletion of natural and human resources that our business practices may cause.

SFTA's vision is to conduct our businesses in a way that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Ecology, human communities and economy are interwoven into a seamless net of causes and effects. The intention of SFTA and sustainable business models is to embrace the challenge to move operations and actions toward sustainable models where the management of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of development, and the evolution of the organic food trade becomes consistent with the principles of sustainability.

Food for Thought:

ASSESS AND EMBRACE SUSTAINABILITY SYSTEMICALLY (NOT PIECEMEAL)

Several challenges can impede adoption of sustainability as a system rather than as a one-off or collection of unrelated parts. There must be buy-in and commitment by management to sustainability metrics integrated into all business and operational decisions. Often a lack of time and budget are cited as obstacles to achieving greater sustainability. The main point is that an organic business should have a sustainability plan and use that to help define and measure progress in a systematic way. It is critical for anyone developing a plan has significant resources and support and education in order to create something that works for them.

[PERFORM A QUICK IMPACT ASSESSMENT TO GET A BASELINE](#)

Core Principles

SFTA IS IN PURSUIT OF ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN ORGANIC FOOD ROOTED IN THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

1

Reduce and eventually eliminate dependence on substances extracted from the earth's crust, such as heavy metals and fossil fuels.

2

Reduce and eventually eliminate dependence on synthetic and bio-accumulating toxic substances produced by humans, such as fossil-fuel based plastics, synthetic pesticides, growth hormones and genetically modified organisms.

3

Reduce and eventually eliminate dependence on materials and processes that degrade the 'stocks' and 'flows' of 'natural capital' such as soil, air and water.

4

Reduce and eventually eliminate dependence on actions that increase social and economic inequity in the way resources are distributed.

SFTA'S ELEVEN (11) INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABILITY



The SFTA began the process of determining indicators in 2005, completing a comprehensive review of the Global Reporting Initiative, US Environmental Protection Agency, Greenhouse Gas Protocol, Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops and CDP. In addition, SFTA conducted research and stakeholder reviews before going through prototypes, tests and a pilot program.

The Key Indicators are:

ORGANIC + LAND USE

SIGNIFICANCE

Organic farming benefits soil health, water resources, human and biotic communities.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Source food products and agriculturally derived products from certified organic farms and operators.

Example :

ABILITY TO CALCULATE PERCENTAGE (%) OF LAND FARMED ORGANICALLY.

DISTRIBUTION + SOURCING

SIGNIFICANCE

The power of supply chain relationships can influence great transformative savings around transportation, local economy building and new models for product distribution.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Improve energy efficiency, reduce energy consumption, and reduce food-miles whenever possible.

Example :

ABILITY TO CALCULATE PERCENTAGE (%) FUEL SAVED FROM SOURCING LOCALLY.

SFTA'S ELEVEN (11) INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABILITY



ENERGY USE

SIGNIFICANCE

Storage, processing and vending of products requires use of energy resources, often inefficient or non-renewable.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Utilize the most environmentally responsible renewable energy opportunities whenever possible and implement energy efficiency.

Example :

ABILITY TO CALCULATE PERCENTAGE (%) OF ENERGY CREATED THROUGH RENEWABLE RESOURCES.

CLIMATE CHANGE + AIR EMISSIONS

SIGNIFICANCE

Production, storage, processing, and retail practices create greenhouse gas emissions.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Understand and measure the carbon footprint of our operations and strive for achieving carbon-neutrality.

Example :

ABILITY TO CALCULATE PERCENTAGE (%) OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT SOURCES OF GHG SAVED.

SFTA'S ELEVEN (11) INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABILITY



WATER USE + QUALITY

SIGNIFICANCE

Businesses waste large amounts of water with inefficiencies, a challenge in a time of water stresses and scarcity.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Reduce use of fresh water and optimize operations so that all water use is as efficient as possible.

Example :

ABILITY TO CALCULATE PERCENTAGE (%)
OF WATER USED IN A PRODUCT AGAINST THE NORM.

SOLID WASTE REDUCTION

SIGNIFICANCE

Waste of material means additional stress from accessing energy and natural resources where reuse and recycling might eliminate such inefficiency and reduce cost.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Eliminate waste so all unused or "wasted" material becomes the raw material for new products and uses.

Example :

ABILITY TO CALCULATE PERCENTAGE (%)
OF WASTE DIVERTED FROM LANDFILL.

SFTA'S ELEVEN (11) INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABILITY



PACKAGING + MARKETING MATERIALS

SIGNIFICANCE

Packaging introduces an unsustainable byproduct into the waste stream on multiple parts of the supply chain system.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Reduce reliance on packaging as well as implement systems for reuse and recycling, in addition eliminating packaging from suppliers whenever possible.

Example :

ABILITY TO CALCULATE PERCENTAGE OF MATERIALS THAT ARE RECYCLED, REUSED OR FROM RENEWABLE SOURCES.

LABOR

SIGNIFICANCE

Communities, which protect and work the land or have a hand in production of our food from field to facility, are particularly vulnerable and must be treated fairly.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Develop and implement company policies, procedures, training and internal reporting structures to ensure commitment to good labor practices throughout the organization.

Example :

ABILITY TO PROVIDE BENEFITS OR ENSURE USE OF FAIR TRADE PRODUCTS WHEN AVAILABLE.

SFTA'S ELEVEN (11) INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABILITY



ANIMAL CARE

SIGNIFICANCE

Animal welfare not only ensures the safety, health and comfort of farm animals but also will create a system of care and attention that honors the whole operation.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Develop practices that provide protection and access to resources that promote the welfare of animals in a production.

Example :

CREATING INTERNAL STANDARDS HELPS
TO SYSTEMATIZE PRACTICES FOR ANIMAL WELFARE.

SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

SIGNIFICANCE

Educating consumers, partners, suppliers and others not only markets your sustainability efforts but also increases awareness around issues within your business and industry.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Provide audiences accurate, useful and timely information about all of the sustainability areas.

Example :

PROVIDING EMPLOYEE TRAINING
INCREASES AWARENESS INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY.

SFTA'S ELEVEN (11) INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABILITY



GOVERNANCE + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

SIGNIFICANCE

Creates an open channel of discussion to build positive relationships within business communities, supporting each other to "do good".

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Review progress through self-audits and reporting on metrics to refine programs that can increase quality of life for people.

Example :

ABILITY TO DONATE TIME AND RESOURCES TO COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS.

Food for Thought:

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS (AND FORGET ABOUT WHAT DOESN'T)

Sustainability does not look the same from one business to the next, making it challenging to see achievements and success. Only one question should influence the development of indicators and metrics: what should my business measure so we can have maximum impact? SFTA's metrics provide the needed structure for organic food companies to begin assessing their sustainability performance. A company can adopt and tailor the metrics knowing that they are measuring and reporting the same key sustainability performance metrics as industry peers, but also personalizing numbers for the uniqueness of their own operation.

[View the Metrics Report Template](#)

QUICK CASE STUDIES



CASE STUDY 1:

STRAUS FAMILY CREAMERY

Alternative (Closed Loop) Energy Source

Straus Family Creamery makes enough electricity from the manure from its own cows to power the entire dairy and to feed some electricity back into the grid. They invested in development and implementation of methane digester, which turns methane gas into electricity.

Straus is addressing multiple indicators – Climate Change, Energy Use, Sustainability Education, Organic and Land Use – through its renewable energy. In addition to

prevention of methane gas from entering the atmosphere (“a greenhouse gas that is 23 times more detrimental than carbon dioxide”), the business shows a net economic savings on electricity of \$40,000+ annually after just 4-5 years of initial investment.

[View Straus Family Creamery Sustainability Report](#)

CASE STUDY 2:

HUMMINGBIRD WHOLESALE

Reducing Waste Throughout Production

Hummingbird Wholesale utilizes a signature return policy for their products packaged and delivered in glass and plastic containers. Bulk materials are delivered in reusable food grade deposit return containers. In addition, the business practices a zero waste policy, working to improve packaging as well as always striving for reusable models whenever possible.

Hummingbird addresses multiple indicators – Packaging, Waste Reduction, Distribution and Sourcing – with its

aggressive measures to focus on reuse and recycling. Currently, they have an 83% return rate for reusable glass and plastic containers, keeping roughly 18,000 pounds of plastic from going into the landfill annually. With this and other measures, Hummingbird estimates its overall landfill waste contributions to be less than 650 pounds per year, which is 1,000 pounds less than the average American individual.

[View Hummingbird Wholesale Sustainability Report](#)

CASE STUDY 3:

EARL'S ORGANIC PRODUCE

Training and Education of Staff

Earl's Organic Produce already had 15% of employees (~70 total) participating in their Sustainability Action Committee. Through their employee sustainability training program and ongoing sustainability trainings, the organization is committed to making sustainability an integral piece of each employee's job description.

Earl's addresses multiple indicators – Governance and Sustainability Education – by working to increase 100% of employees through a new internal governance approach.

[View Earl's Organic Produce Sustainability Report](#)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPARENCY



In order to create trust between you and your audiences – consumers, partners, suppliers, etc. – you must do more than trumpet sustainability as a goal or core ethic. Sharing your sustainability journey not only validates for others the investments and commitments you are making, but also opens up a discussion for additional problem-solving around challenges or obstacles.

Issuing a “sustainability report” – in whatever format and shape that makes sense for you – not only shares with internal and external audiences your progress, but also demonstrates areas that need improvement. Such reports can also help educate or promote activity around issues that seem insurmountable at the time (e.g., distribution reliance on fossil fuels or packaging that fulfills sustainability and food safety requirements).

Transparency can show the full picture. For instance, while overall energy consumption might rise with the addition of a new product or process, a decrease in the average energy used per product can demonstrate the performance of mitigation strategies. It allows you to share a story that chronicles how far you’ve come, but also recognizes a commitment to how far you still want to go.

Six Elements of Transparency

(FROM SOURCE: [SustainAbility](#))

1. Right information: Use clear data of “what matters” to give the right kinds of information needed to contribute to better outcomes.
2. Right stakeholders: Reach the stakeholders who can use data to make better decisions
3. Right format: Not too many folks want to read a 158-paged PDF about responsible mining. Using a mosaic of format options – social media, infographics, apps, conference events – is going to form a high-resolution image of effective transparency.
4. Right time: Successful transparency efforts should be timed in such a way that they enable stakeholders to act in order to improve possible outcomes.
5. Right frequency: Similar to format, this means providing stakeholders with effective systems and safeguards to find and share data, to create a sort of constant leaching of information that is effective and infectious.
6. Right intentions: This is potentially the nut of the thing it refers to being genuine about why information is being made available. Be sure to review what might yield more meaningful, opportunity-laden ways to use your resources put towards transparency.

Additional Resources:

- **Establishing a Baseline:** <http://www.sustainablefoodtrade.org/measure-what-matters/>
- **Sustainability Systems Framework:** <http://www.thenaturalstep.org/>
- **Sustainable Packaging:** <http://www.sustainablepackaging.org/>
- **Sustainability Software:** <http://www.sofi-software.com/america/applications/sustainability-reporting>
<http://www.scope5.com>
- **Waste Reduction and Zero Waste Certification:** <https://www.uszwbc.org/>
- **Relational Reality by Charlene Spretnak:** http://www.charlenespretnak.com/relational_reality_116771.htm