

Case Report

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## Case Report

# The Sustainability Journey: Efforts, Challenges, and the Road Ahead for a Global Food Service Giant

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**Abstract:** This paper explores Burger King's sustainability efforts in the face of growing environmental and social challenges. It begins by defining sustainability and its importance in corporate operations, then transitions to analyze Burger King's specific practices, particularly its efforts to reduce methane emissions from beef production and tackle deforestation linked to its supply chain. While the company has made some strides in addressing environmental concerns, such as introducing low-emission beef burgers, these initiatives have been deemed inadequate by experts. The paper highlights the gaps in Burger King's approach to sustainability and compares it to industry leaders like McDonald's, emphasizing the need for more robust and transparent measures. The conclusion suggests that Burger King must take more aggressive steps in aligning its operations with sustainable practices to meet the demands of modern consumers and secure its long-term viability.

**Keywords:** sustainability; supply chain management; climate change mitigation; corporate social responsibility; fast food industry; environmental impact

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## Introduction

Sustainability encompasses initiatives to preserve specific resources in the social, ecological, and economic tenets of life. It focuses on meeting the present generation's needs without limiting future generations' ability to meet their needs. Sustainability is anchored on the reasoning that developing such strategies raise a company's durability. Sustainability is becoming a necessity for all corporations across all industries (Seuring& Muller, 2008). The majority of the

executives consider sustainability as a competitive strategy, and it's estimated that more executives will consider it as so in the future (Crum et al. 2011). In the modern society, corporate responsibility has increased, and transparency is predominant; therefore, corporations appreciate the need to act on sustainability. Notable leading firms adopting sustainability efforts include Burger King, Nike, Walmart, and Coca-Cola. Firms that have adopted sustainability efforts have made commitments mostly through transparency and tackling material issues. For sustainability efforts to work effectively, organizations need to close two essential gaps: the knowing vs. implementation gap (Seuring& Muller, 2008). This gap accounts for the differences among companies for merely implementing sustainability and implementing sustainability in a manner that creates, delivers, and captures all stakeholders. Second is the gap between obedience and competitive advantage. Numerous companies consider sustainability as an area for competition, although all organizations should embrace sustainability (King, 2017). Executives should to address these issues independently since sustainability is necessary, but competitive benefit requires only material issues.

Sustainability consists of three main components that is; the economy, the ecology, and the society (Crum et al. 2011). These components are of concern because they are part of the Burger King's supply chain. Among the three components, the environment gets most attention, primarily due to reducing carbon emission. The social pillar encompasses an organization's ability to support its workers' stakeholders and the society it works in. Although it's not all about sustainability under sustainability, the economic pillar is the most reassuring for most organizations. Under sustainability, this pillar encompasses good governance, risk control, and compliance (Pinard et al. 2014).

## Background

Burger King is a US-based multinational agency that runs a chain of restaurants. Its head offices are located in Miami and were founded in 1953 with burgers as the primary product. Since then, the company has changed hands several times and merged with other organizations. Over the years, Burger King's menu has evolved from offering just milkshakes, sodas, burgers, and French

fries to more varied products (Coyne, 1993). The whooper was the first significant addition in 1957, and since then, it has become a signature product for Burger King. Since then, numerous products have been introduced in the market, some of which have been failed in America but succeeded in other places. The diversification of the products necessitated that the company

sources more materials. Seeking materials for use has dramatically affected the ecological pillar of sustainability, especially for contributing to global warming (Pinard et al. 2014).

### Burger King's Sustainability Efforts.

Burger King recently launched beef burgers from cows that fart and belch less methane gas in the interest of tackling climate change and sustaining the availability of fast foods. In 2017 UNEP marked beef as harmful-climate meat. Burger King runs on beef, which made it imperative for it to handle sustainability seriously. Taking action was the best choice for the environment, and their business in the long-run-since Burger King is a global company and should participate in global conversations. Therefore in July this year, Burger King launched a project to reduce cow fart to curtail methane emissions (Valinsky, 2020). The company intends to achieve this by revitalizing its cow's low-carb diet with lemongrass. Methane is a greenhouse gas responsible for global warming. Burger King's global chief of marketing said that select restaurants in five cities across America would be serving "reduced methane emissions" beef.

Over the last thirteen years, about 271 million acres of rainforest have been damaged worldwide to create room for cultivating products used in restaurants such as Burger King. Deforestation is responsible for 10% of the global greenhouse gas emissions, which lead to climate change (Lloret, 2016). Global warming has been one of the most significant impacts of climate change. This has led to other unprecedented effects such as a rise in sea level, which are currently a concern in New York City and Miami. Adapting to these environmental changes has been a challenge to the authorities since it's expensive. A sustainability report released by Burger King in 2016 acknowledged that some of its suppliers were clearing primary forests or interfering with conservation land.

Soy suppliers' development of community land to cultivate soy violates the neighboring communities' rights. Over the years, suppliers have developed community lands without communities' consent to cultivate Burger King's required products. This practice has consistently jeopardized the social pillar of sustainability. The social pillar is based on social authorization and states that a sustainable business supports its staff, investors, and community (Bonadonna et al. 2019). There are various strategies for initiating and maintaining this support, but it all narrows down to treating employees and the community with dignity. For the employees, organizations have to come up with engagement strategies and benefits for staff.

### Burger King's Sustainability Efforts: Barely Trying.

Fast-food firms such as Burger King and McDonald's are, by virtue of what they offer, causing a significant toll on the environment. In 2017 UNEP highlighted beef as climate harmful due to astronomical impact compared to that of chicken and pork per kilogram (Homan, 2020) Compared to pork and chicken, beef requires more water and land, which translates to more climate warming. Both Burger King and McDonalds run on beef; therefore, their existence is hostile to the environment. But for this reason, these firms must handle sustainability diligently. Burger King has made efforts to ensure sustainable sourcing and selling of its products, although these efforts are insufficient (Eshel et al. 2014)

Burger King has a lengthy history of sourcing commodities that are linked to deforestation. The firm is a chief purchaser of palm oil, beef, paper products, soy, and beef, which are drivers of tropical deforestation. Notwithstanding frequent consumer calls for deforestation-free purchasing, the firm has failed to implement its products' sustainable sourcing (Coombs, 2010). For example, from the 2016 sustainability report, Burger King does not guarantee sourcing palm oil sustainably. This verification is a gradual plan that they had planned to implement this year, although the implementation is yet to happen. Compared to McDonald's, Burger King lies significantly behind; McDonald's has minimized substantially sourcing beef and soy from unsustainable sources and ensured the purchase of palm oil for restaurant cooking from authorized certified sourcing (Eshel et al. 2014).

Additionally, Burger King has made minimal efforts to influence consumer behavior. The firm has not laid out plans to serve more fruit and vegetables, and its measures of saving energy by recycling can be classified as minimal and delayed.

### Way Forward

Being a global fast-food chain, Burger King holds an enviable position that can be used to shape the discourse on sustainability. Presently consumers are aware of the firm's sourcing practices, and this impacts purchasing choices. Sustainable sourcing is good for the environment and has implications on the supply of goods (Homan, 2020). Therefore, by sourcing products such as beef, soy, and palm oil, Burger King would be taking steps to ensure it can receive these products at reasonable prices in the future. Considering that Burger King is influential over consumer demand, it can encourage eating habits that are more beneficial to the environment (Homan, 2020). For example, the firm may offer healthier snacks, reduce soft drink quantities, or social/financial incentives for customers that eat healthier.

### Conclusions

Burger King is on a journey towards sustainability, although efforts towards this direction are not sufficient. This is because these efforts are not enough to create, deliver, and incorporate all stakeholders. Nonetheless, significant steps have been made in this direction, although more action is needed. In contemporary society, sustainability is an issue of concern for corporations across all industries since some executives consider it a competitive advantage. However, there still exists a gap between realizing this and implementing sustainability in a business model. Burger King is yet to bridge this gap, and experts feel its deadlines should be a bit closer. In the eyes of experts, these efforts are inadequate, and there is a need for improvements.

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