Taking Action on Climate Change

—by Katherine DiMatteo, Sustainable Food Trade Association, www.sustainablefoodtrade.org

I struggled to decide if I should start with the good news or the bad news. Best, perhaps, to start with the sobering news to emphasize why taking action on climate change is so important.

Did you know that global temperature is not just increasing, but accelerating? The average increase from 1900 to 1958 was about 0.007 degrees Celsius per year. From 1958 to 2015 it doubled to 0.015 degrees Celsius per year, and from February 1998 to February 2016 it rose by an average of 0.025 degrees Celsius per year!

Did you know that children are most at risk from climate change? According to a new Princeton University study the young are physically more susceptible to extreme heat, drought, and natural disasters and that their development can also be affected by poor nutrition, migration, conflicts, and disease brought on by climate change.

Did you know that rising CO2 levels may contribute to die-off of bees? According to a study of North American bees the adverse impact of rising CO2 concentrations on the protein levels in pollen may be playing a role in the global die-off of bee populations by undermining bee nutrition and reproductive success. “Pollen is becoming junk food for bees,” says Lewis Ziska, a plant physiologist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Research Service in Maryland and lead author of the study. Another blow to our precious pollinators!

Time is truly running out...

There is good, even great news though. The Paris Accord on Climate Change was signed by 175 countries on April 22, 2016, Earth Day; 1,000 companies have publically called for carbon pricing as a way to drive investment in low carbon energy; mayors from about 500 cities, all over the globe, have joined the Compact of Mayors initiative to reduce cities’ greenhouse gas emissions by promoting electric vehicles and shared mobility; and more than half of all new investment in energy projects has gone to renewable power since the start of 2015.

Consumers are taking notice of companies who are taking climate change initiatives. According to Natural Marketing Institute’s 2016 State of Sustainability in America® report, 42% of the general population and 71% of the LOHAS consumers would buy more from their favorite brand if they learned that the brand is switching 100% of its energy purchases to renewable energy sources such as wind or solar.

Even the USDA is scaling up their Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry initiative which was launched in 2015. Through this initiative, USDA is committing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon stored in forests and soils by over 120 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year by 2025. That amount is the equivalent of taking 25 million cars off the road, or offsetting the emissions produced by powering nearly 11 million homes.

A new investment of $72.3 million has been announced for building soil health to sequester carbon and manage nutrients to reduce emissions.

Both the bad and good news has caused some reflection by the Sustainable Food Trade Association (SFTA) and One Step Closer to an Organic and Sustainable Community (OSC2) on how we might do more to engage our members and other organic and natural foods companies in meaningful commitment and action. Led by sustainability expert, Nancy Hirshberg, nine actions item have been identified that will have significant positive impact:

- Procure 100% of electricity from renewable sources
- Remove commodity-driven deforestation from all supply chains
- Decrease emissions from shipping/logistics
- Eliminate food waste in the supply chain
- Source 100% of agricultural products from regenerative, carbon net positive farms
- Reduce short-lived climate pollutant emissions
- Adopt sustainable packaging for all products
- Adopt aggressive GHG (greenhouse gas emissions) reduction targets
- Engage responsibly in changing climate policy

Are you already taking action? Thank you! Can your company do more? Don’t know where to start? Don’t know how to measure your impact? SFTA can help you today, contact me. And, watch for more news about a sector-wide initiative that will leverage the expertise and programs of many organizations to reverse climate change.

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