U.S. organic food trade group marks major milestone
SFTA members celebrate 10 years of slashing environmental, social impacts

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The Sustainable Food Trade Association (SFTA) said Monday its decade-long effort to address climate change, waste, resource conservation, and fair labor standards have yielded "millions of investment dollars in sustainability innovation."

The New Castle, Va.-based trade group was formed in July 2008 by U.S. organic food companies in an effort to help transition organic companies in building their capacity to become sustainable business models by measuring, analyzing, and reporting their sustainability activities.

"Membership in SFTA sets leading companies apart," said Natalie Reitman-White, a founder of SFTA, and vice president of organizational vitality and sustainability at one of the nation's largest organic produce distributors, Organically Grown Company (OGC), which said over the weekend it had become the first U.S. company to be owned by a perpetual purpose trust.


"SFTA members have experienced significant reduction in their environmental and social impact through the sustainability resources provided for companies to define, measure, and improve their performance year after year," the group said in a press release.

Every year, SFTA publishes a Member Sustainability Progress Report that compiles the data from SFTA member reports to demonstrate their collective impact.

SFTA also publishes quarterly case studies on best practices, metrics tracking, and reporting practices that highlight the efforts of individual members and their successes. The trade group also produces a webinar series that focuses on industry specific topics such as leveraging sustainability efforts to build brands.

"When we sat down in 2008 with the idea of building sustainable business models for the organic industry, we had no idea how impactful our ideas would become," said Melody Meyer, founding SFTA board member representing UNFI, which she recently resigned from. "Over the last 10 years many like-minded businesses have come together to learn from each other and share best practices truly improving their sustainable business practices. Completing the annual impact report each year and sharing our results was a powerful feedback tool that helped us broaden our impact at UNFI."

Early last year, SFTA and OSC2 (One Step Closer to an Organic and Sustainable Community), a coalition of organic and natural food industry executives committed to bringing sustainable companies to the mass market, partnered to launch the Climate Collaborative, an initiative to mitigate the impact of climate change.

The 14-month-old Collaborative recruits companies to sign up for one or more of nine sustainability commitment areas: agriculture, energy efficiency, food waste, forests, packaging, policy, renewable energy, short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs), transportation.

Once a company registers its commitment, the Collaborative, working with NGOs, consultants and solution providers, direct companies - manufacturers, retailers, brokers, distributors, suppliers, etc. - to specific resources and identify actions they can take to fulfill their commitments.

To date, the 261 companies making the pledge have made 973 commitments such as integrating carbon farming into their supply chains, switching to renewable power, reducing the climate impacts of their packaging, removing deforestation from their supply chains, and engaging on climate policy, among others.

"The founders’ vision was prescient as sustainability is now broadly recognized as a business imperative with rising consumer expectations for authentic social and environmental commitments," said Jonathan Reinbold, Organic Valley's sustainability, research and grant manager, who was elected SFTA board president in March. "SFTA has kept its members on the leading edge to quantify, understand and communicate their social and environmental impacts and has helped raise the bar throughout the industry. SFTA’s role as a technical-assistance provider and capacity builder is as needed today as it was ten years ago."