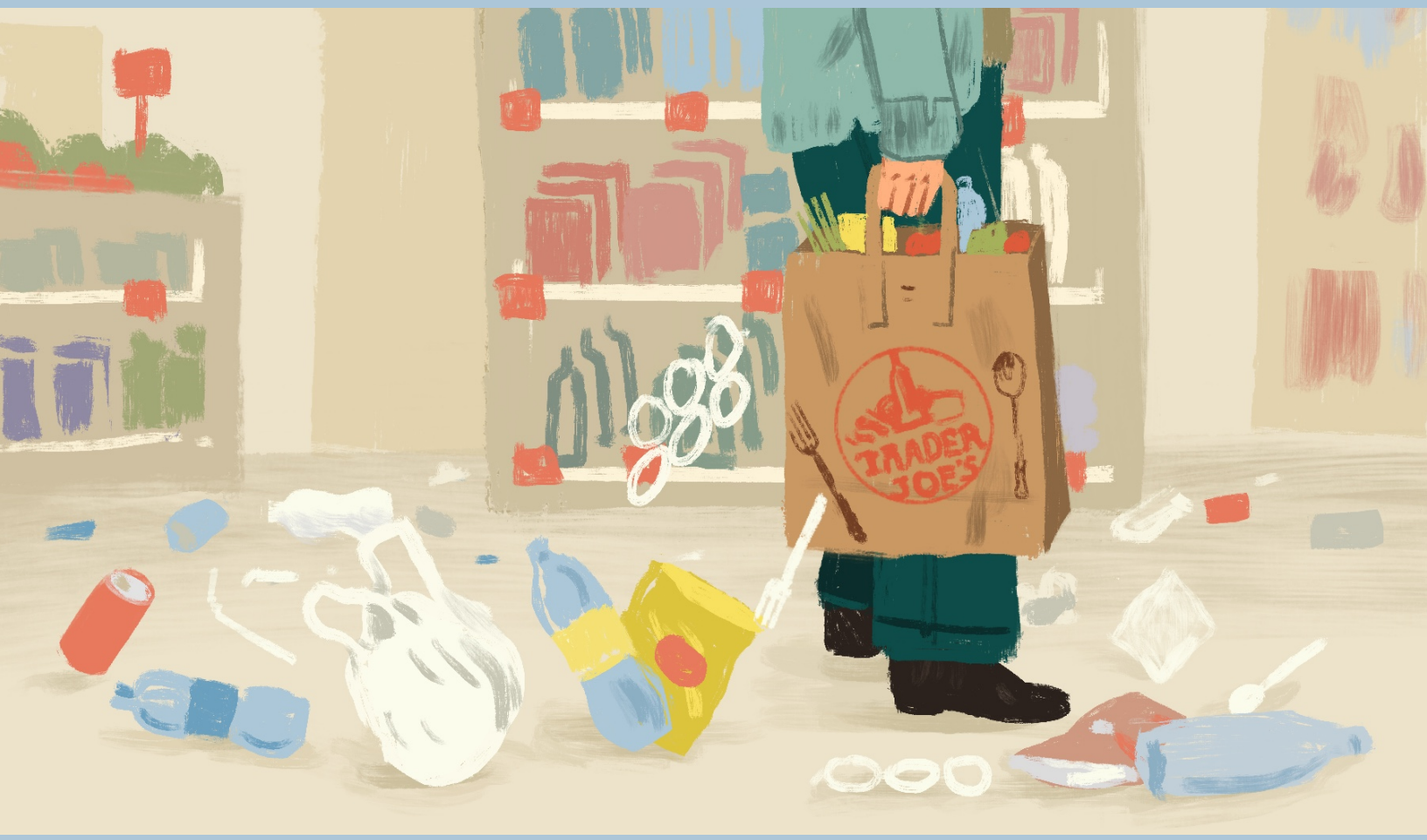
Trader Joe's Sustainability Report



This report aims to provide information for the Trader Joe's sustainability team, who will be attending the virtual strategic planning call for the sustainability action plan for Trader Joe's. For our first meeting, please familiarize yourself with the content so that you can engage in the brainstorming process.

Trader Joe’s Existing Sustainability Strategy - A Critique

Trader Joe's, known for its affordable prices, high-quality products, and enjoyable shopping experience, is a beloved institution in America committed to sustainability in its operations and marketing.

By critically analyzing Trader Joe's sustainability vision, this paper aims to provide a realistic overview of its strengths and weaknesses. As a result of this study, Trader Joe's will be able to gain clarity on where it stands compared to its competitors regarding sustainability. It will also be able to chart creative, strategic ways forward as it pursues corporate social responsibility (CSR).

To critique this sustainability strategy accurately, I have used a set of key principles, including the four rules of sustainability (Sustainability Illustrated, 2014), that provide businesses and organizations a lens to see what areas require a change of strategy, ensuring a sustainable future for their organization. I have also compared Trader Joe's current sustainability practices to the 23 Future Fit Business Break-Even Goals, which are "*the minimum performance thresholds every business must strive to reach*" for sustainability (6. Break-Even Goals | Future-Fit Business Benchmark, n.d.).

The main focus of Trader Joe's sustainability efforts is on their website, where they mention that they are striving to be more energy efficient, sourcing products sustainably, mitigating waste, and reducing emissions as much as possible through their transport practices. It is essential to take a closer look at each of these four areas in more detail to analyze their effectiveness.

Energy Efficiency

One of Trader Joe's strengths is energy efficiency, especially in its store design. These intentionally small (about 12.5 thousand square feet) *"neighborhood"* stores open for limited hours and are by design more energy efficient than their competitors' larger, 24-hour stores. Moreover, the newly built stores are built with minimal materials, fitted with *"energy efficient LED lighting"*, use CO2-based refrigeration, and some have solar panels installed on their roofs (Trader Joe's, n.d.). This is indeed a strength. However, due to Trader Joe's lack of detailed disclosure, it's unknown how many of its 561 stores in 42 states are of this standard (ScrapeHero, n.d.). There is a real issue regarding the climate-polluting hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) from refrigeration used in its old stores that the *"Don't Discount Our Future"* campaign raised against Trader Joe's in 2020 (www.greenamerica.org, n.d.).

Sustainable Sourcing

Sustainable sourcing is another area Trader Joe's has pursued. As well as limiting its product list to *"approximately 3,400"* (Trader Joe's, n.d.), it also states that 23% of the products sourced are local or organic (Trader Joe's, n.d.). They also note that they work with suppliers to ensure that products are ethically sourced, and workers are treated fairly. Trader Joe's has earned a good reputation for treating its employees well. Including a clear commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), they provide their employees with health care, benefits, competitive pay, paid time off, and opportunities for job growth (Trader Joe's, 2021).

However, regarding their efforts to secure ethically sourced products from their suppliers, critics have pointed out that their lack of transparency or *"secrecy over suppliers and ingredients"* (Jkaybay, 2021) leaves consumers unsure about the trustworthy standing of their sourcing ethics. We have found out, only due to product recalls, some of the companies behind the Trader Joe's brand. These include ConAgra, PepsiCo, and Nestlé, all of which have poor ethical and sustainability ratings. Without transparency on suppliers, it's difficult to know how beneficial or detrimental Trader Joe's sourcing is (Jkaybay, 2021).

Reduction of Waste

Trader Joe's has implemented several initiatives to reduce waste, including recycling, composting, and food waste. Recently they have reached some significant milestones in recycling. According to the company, as of 2022, "*more than 4.6 million pallets of wood were recycled, more than 277 million pounds of plastic were recycled, and more than 311 million pounds of cardboard were recycled"* (Trader Joe's, n.d.). As well as this, over the last few years, they have removed *"more than 12 million pounds of plastic packaging"* (Trader Joe's, n.d.) from their products. They also have an impressive initiative called the *"Neighborhood Shares Program"* that streamlines almost 100% of their safe food waste to feed needy people. While this focus on waste reduction is one of the strengths of the company's sustainability strategy, there is still room for improvement. Setting measurable objectives for the company to achieve zero waste goals over the next few years will accomplish this.

Transport Efficiency

Trader Joe's has done a good job of reviewing how their product transportation contributes to greenhouse gases. Over the past few years, they have adjusted their delivery routes and warehouse locations, *"taking hundreds of millions of miles"* out of their transportation system (Trader Joe's, n.d.). As a result, their greenhouse gas emissions have decreased significantly. In addition to this, according to their website, they have also purchased 100 electric delivery trucks to deliver goods to major cities in the United States. Although Trader Joe's has made some admirable changes to their transportation business practices, it could do more to reduce its carbon footprint. For example, they could source their products from local farmers and producers to further reduce the distance their goods travel.

How does Trader Joe's sustainability efforts stack up against the four sustainability rules?

The four rules of sustainability provide a framework for businesses to know whether or not they are achieving sustainability success. Based on four scientific conditions *"that define sustainability on principle level" (Sustainability Illustrated, 2014),* three of the rules are about the wellbeing of nature, and one is about the wellbeing of human beings. The wisdom of these rules is that we can secure a sustainable future for our planet if we guard these areas. So how is Trader Joe's scoring regarding these four essential areas of sustainability?

Trader Joe's Four Rules of Sustainability Assessment

1. Nature is NOT subject to the systematically increasing of substances extracted from the earth's crust. Trader Joe's is not investing in renewable energies, which help mitigate the depletion of the earth's resources, such as oil and other substances extracted from the earth's crust.

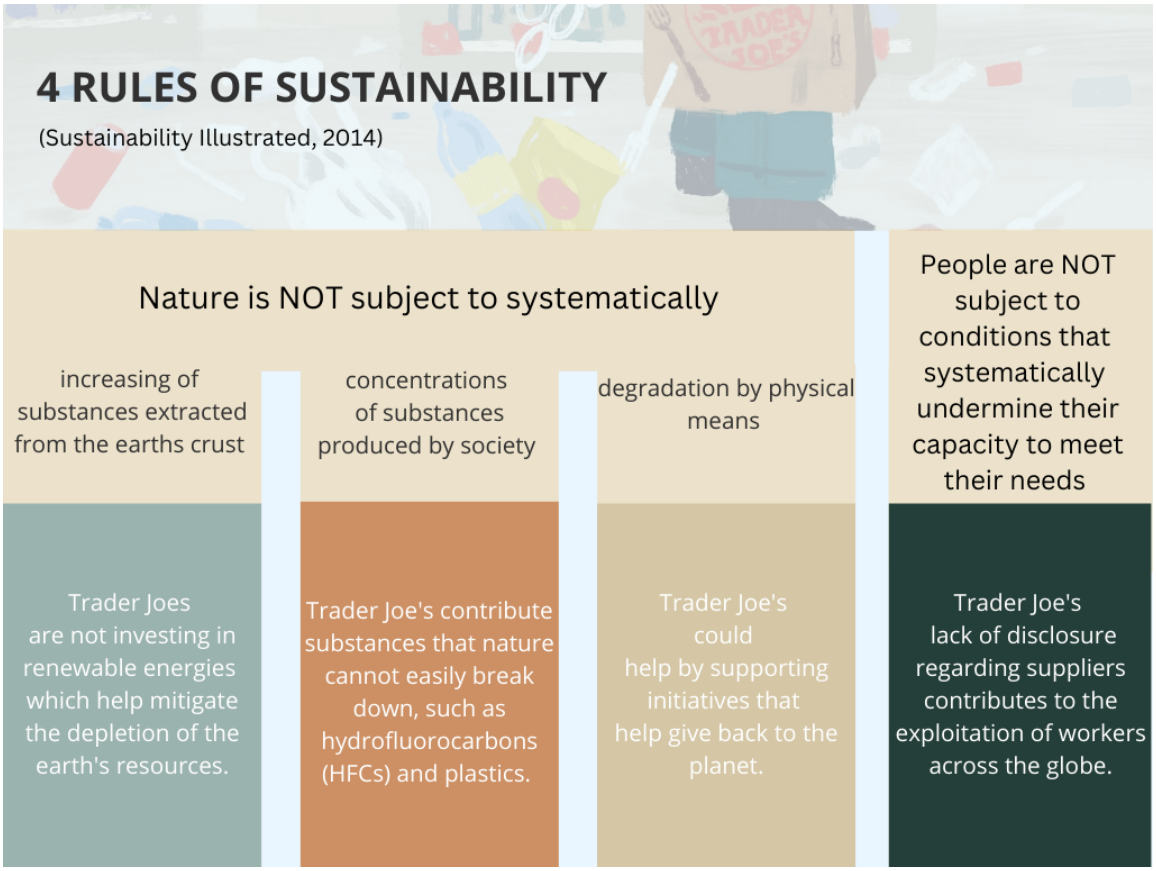
2. Nature is NOT subject to systematic concentrations of substances produced by society. Trader Joe's continue to contribute substances (chemicals and

compounds) that nature cannot easily break down, such as hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) and plastics.

3. Nature is NOT subject to systematic degradation by physical means. While their commitment to sustainable seafood is a significant effort, Trader Joe's could also help by supporting initiatives that help give back to the planet - such as planting new trees.

4. People are NOT subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs. While they are sufficiently meeting the needs of their employees, Trader Joe's lack of disclosure regarding suppliers, contributes to the exploitation of workers across the globe. (Sustainability Illustrated, 2014)

Overall Trader Joe's still has a lot of work to do to successfully impact the four sustainability rules.



Redeeming Trader Joe's Poor Reputation

As well as their need to address the four rules of sustainability, Trader Joe's has some work to do regarding their reputation in the sustainability arena.

A report released in 2021 by Brightly, an online sustainability platform, ranked Trader Joe's as the most unsustainable of seven retail chains in the US - including Walmart, Whole Foods, Costco, and Target. In this report, Trader Joe's scored a dismal 14 out of a possible 50, mainly due to its poor performance in areas such as in-store recycling, the adoption of clean energy, and the reduction of waste they make (Brightly, n.d.). Another report, *"The United States Supermarket Scorecard 2022,"* by climate-friendly supermarkets, ranked Trader Joe's as one of the least sustainable stores in the US. The report cited that Trader Joe's did not disclose how much polluted-filled HFCs it used in its refrigeration to keep foods cool as the significant reason for its dismal ranking (Climate-Friendly Supermarkets, n.d.).

Trader Joe's and Future Fit Business Break-Even Goals

The Future-Fit group has researched ways to help businesses identify achievable, sustainable development goals for over a decade. Based on the inputs, activities, employees, products, and citizenship of the organization, they provide a methodology and an action guide that enable the business to benchmark itself through a set of break-even goals (Break-Even Goals | Future-Fit Business Benchmark, n.d.).

When comparing Trader Joe's sustainability practices to the 23 break-even goals, the company scores as only meeting 1/3 of these goals. It is clear from the analysis of their current sustainability strategy they have much more to do to make a business case for sustainability. The company's sustainable strategy lacks ambitious targets. Their sustainability plans need to be adjusted to meet more future-fit business break-even goals (Break-Even Goals | Future-Fit Business Benchmark, n.d.) so that they create a value equation for all their stakeholders.

There is certainly some work to do to move Trader Joe's towards being a company with a business case for sustainability.They must set more ambitious sustainability goals alongside a wholly owned, transparent, and visible integrated sustainability strategy. It is my opinion, however, that if Trader Joe's implements these changes, it will secure a prosperous business future for the company.

Let's Talk Smart Business

Trader Joe's has the opportunity to embark on integrating a sustainability strategy that forms a core part of the company's business model. There is compelling evidence that if they do this, they will secure and add value to the company's future. Adopting a sustainability vision that becomes the focal point of their

business will bring Trader Joe's several business benefits and provide them with several opportunities for long-term growth, ensuring they become one of the leading forward-thinking grocery stores in the United States.

I believe the following are some of the factors which could make it an excellent decision to make this leap forward into a more sustainable focused future for Trader Joe's:

Increased Profits

It is widely believed that one of the primary reasons companies adopt sustainability strategies is to maximize profits. It might be one of the key reasons why *"93 percent of CEOs see sustainability as important to their company's future success"* (A New Era of Sustainability UN Global Compact-Accenture CEO Study 2010, n.d.). A leading expert on the subject, Bob Willard, has spent many years researching the business case for sustainability and analyzing hundreds of case studies. He estimates that large corporations, similar to Trader Joe's, can expect to see an increase in their profits of up to 81% over 3-5 years, if they adopt best practices for sustainability that are already being implemented by large corporations around the world (Sustainability in Business = 51% to 81% MORE PROFIT (CSR), 2014). The reason for this is that when sustainability practices are applied to a business, they will lead to an increase in revenue and a decrease in expenses over the long term. The company will therefore be able to reduce their energy, water, and other resources costs, as well as increase their brand value and customer loyalty as a result of this. Additionally, it can also help a company attract and retain talent, which can lead to a greater level of productivity in the long run as well. It should be noted that Willard's estimate is based simply on implementing current best practices. It does not consider what could be achieved through new innovation.

Sustainability paves the way for a lucrative future for Trader Joe's shareholders. Moreover, Trader Joe's, with its innovative culture, is one of the few companies out there that have the potential to take increasing profits through sustainability endeavors to another level.

Brand Reputation

Sustainability and environmental issues have become increasingly relevant to consumers today. 66% of consumers surveyed said they would be willing to spend more on a product if it came from a sustainable brand (Nielsen, 2015). CEOs have identified the consumer as among their most significant stakeholders (A New Era of Sustainability UN Global Compact-Accenture CEO Study 2010, n.d.). Because of this, a company's brand must be relevant to the consumers' beliefs.

Simon Sinek, in his 2010 Ted Talk on *"How leaders inspire action,"* said, *"People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it"* (Sinek, 2010). This purpose-driven business model is becoming more prominent as large corporations like Nike and many more model and demonstrate how corporate social responsibility (CSR) makes viable business sense and builds loyalty from consumers and employees. Companies that care about their carbon footprints, supply chain, the use of sustainable materials, the prevention of waste, and the equality of people who are innovating to meet these objectives are showing outstanding success.

> "People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it"

According to a recent report, *"Shoptivism: Why Consumers Opt-In & Out of Today's Brands,"* published by Shelton Group (the nation's leading marketing communications agency focused on Sustainability and corporate social responsibility), sustainability is crucial to innovation for brands (Gain a sustainable advantage, 2021). Their report states, *"Sustainability is mainstream and it's affecting purchase behavior. Your company's environmental and social record are increasingly reasons for consumers to buy or not buy from your brand."* Their report asked Americans, *"Have you ever chosen a product or service over another or stopped purchasing a product or service based on the social or environmental record of the brand?* Responding to this question, 26% said yes and named the brand.

The report identified three subgroups out of this group: the choosers, the stoppers, and the changelings:

Choosers, according to the article, choose a brand or product because of its ethical or ecological record or because it has an excellent reputation - they trust large corporations, read up on a company's sustainability report and are typically millennials (25-44 years old) who are city dwellers (Gain a sustainable advantage, 2021).

As the name suggests, stoppers are those people who have stopped purchasing a product or service because of the brand's social or environmental record. They do so on a personal level. They are more likely to be boomers (over 64 years old), live in rural locations and be less informed about science-based sustainability goals (Gain a sustainable advantage, 2021).

Changelings are the group of people who choose to purchase products *and* stop buying products based on the brands' sustainability efforts. Mostly from Gen Z (18-24 years of age), changelings are more concerned with the environment than their own comfort and convenience. Their decision to buy a product or service from a company with an environmental or social commitment is one of the most important factors for them when deciding what brands or companies to support (Gain a sustainable advantage, 2021).

> *"Sustainability is mainstream and it's affecting purchase behavior. Your company's environmental and social record are increasingly reasons for consumers to buy or not buy from your brand."*

I believe that with a brand that embodies sustainability as its core purpose, Trader Joe's will be able to expand, retain and secure its customer base for the years to come.

As far as Trader Joe's current brand is concerned, it has served them well so far. With its "*less is more"* business model, where the store's packaging and the shopping experience are the marketing strategy, along with its adventuresome culinary options and reasonable prices, Trader Joe's has built a successful cult-like following (Rohith, 2021).

However, I believe that to ensure that Trader Joe's has a successful future, their branding needs to undergo a significant redevelopment to appeal to consumers interested in the sustainable practices and products that companies offer, which is what I see as an attainable goal.

According to Numerator analytics, the average Trader Joe's customer is married in an urban area aged 25 to 44, earning $80,000 (www.numerator.com, n.d.). Based on this study, Trader Joe's branding needs to appeal to *'choosers'* who currently resemble the typical Trader Joe's demographic. Remember, these people want to read an annual sustainability report produced by the company they are purchasing from. Trader Joe's has yet to create a document like this - in terms of sustainability branding, less is not more! In addition, to secure a customer base for the future, especially in the next 10 to 20 years, they will also need to design their branding to appeal to the *'changelings'* who will make up their demographic. Changelings demand far more sustainability from businesses they support - they distrust large company chains, sniff out greenwashing and want sustainability embedded in the industries they follow (Gain a sustainable advantage, 2021).

Holding sustainability to the core of its business model is a massive opportunity for the Trader Joe's brand. This already unorthodox business (Rohith, 2021) has capitalized on running business differently from mainstream models. Trader Joe's, I believe, is one of the best-positioned grocers out there to take the next step and become one of the leading grocers when it comes to sustainability in business.

Employee Engagement

Employee retention benefits businesses in many ways. These include saving costs, improving productivity, creating consistency and stability, increasing employee engagement and loyalty, and fostering a positive work environment. The price to a business of employee turnover is incredibly high, often 1.5 to 2 times the exiting employee's salary (Heinz, 2020). However, hidden costs also extend beyond advertising the position, training the replacement hire, and recovering lost productivity (Heinz, 2020).

In their article, *'Great Attrition' or 'Great Attraction'? The choice is yours"* global marketing consultants McKinsey and Company share that *"A record number of employees are quitting or thinking about doing so."* They also state, *"Organizations that take the time to learn why—and act thoughtfully—will have an edge in attracting and retaining talent"* (www.mckinsey.com, n.d.). Their findings show that the top two reasons people stay at a job are because of a sense of its purpose and their sense of belonging.

A sustainable strategy appears to be one of the most important factors when it comes to attracting and retaining employees, as well as the company's success. According to recent research, *"65% of employees under the age of 40 agree it's important that their employer positively impacts society"* (Morgenstern, n.d.).

There is no doubt that Trader Joe's has an excellent track record when it comes to its employees. It is well known in the industry for offering competitive pay to its employees and ensuring the work environment is positive (Indigo9 Digital Inc., n.d.). With a more substantial commitment to sustainability and a more comprehensive vision for future growth in sustainability efforts, I believe Trader Joe's will further bolster their internal competencies with an even more loyal and energetic workforce.

Risk Mitigation

By implementing a sustainability strategy, Trader Joe's will significantly reduce the risks posed to its future success.

In a PESTLE analysis, where we look at the various external factors that can impact a business (including political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental factors), we can see how a sustainability-focused strategy will contribute towards mitigating several risks posed to a business like Trader Joe's (Alanzi, 2018).

Here are some external risks that Trader Joe's can avoid for its stakeholders by implementing a robust sustainability strategy.

Political factors

Governments are implementing regulations to reduce carbon emissions and promote sustainability *(US EPA, 2021)***.** By implementing a sustainability strategy, Trader Joe's can avoid potential fines and penalties.

Economic factors

Investors now view a high carbon footprint as a risk *(www.youtube.com, n.d.)*. Trading Joe's will be considered a good investment if it sets ambitious carbon emissions goals and discloses its carbon emissions transparently.

Social factors

Sustainability and ethical business are popular among consumers *(Nielsen, 2015)*. Trader Joe's can secure a customer base as a forward-thinking sustainability business.

Technological factors

Customers increasingly purchase products online *(Team, n.d.)*. Trader Joe's will become a competitor by adapting to this need and implementing e-commerce.

Legal factors

Current legal regulations require compliance with product safety and packaging *(Team, M.S. (n.d.)*. With more visible and transparent packaging, Trade Joe's will avoid the potential legal risks of non-compliance.

Environmental factors

Many stakeholders highly demand environmental accountability. The more transparent Trader Joe's is with its supply chain, the less likely it is to receive a bad reputation.

Let's be honest about the challenges

For Trader Joe's to integrate a sustainability business case, certain challenges must be overcome and opportunities selected. For this part of the paper, I used a SWOT analysis to show Trader Joe's strengths and weaknesses and its opportunities and threats. This report provides a good overview of where Trader Joe's stands and what opportunities exist.



Let's be honest about the challenges Trader Joe's will face in moving towards an integrated sustainability strategy. According to the SWOT report, Trader Joe's faces several sustainability challenges. I believe these four will be the most pressing:

Sustainable and Affordable Value

With high-quality products at affordable prices, Trader Joe's might find it challenging to sell sustainable products, which may result in higher customer costs. To remain competitive, they must balance affordability and sustainability.

Despite this, a recent survey found that 66% of Americans would be willing to spend more on sustainable products (Nielsen, 2015).

Ensuring Sustainable Sourcing

As Trader Joe's has made strides in sourcing sustainably produced products from various suppliers, ensuring they meet these standards remains challenging. Overseas suppliers can be an issue, where verifying the environmental impacts of production practices can be difficult.

To achieve this commitment, Trader Joe's must review current suppliers transparently and set attainable goals to make changes.

Transport Emissions

Goods transported worldwide to stores in the United States significantly contribute to air pollution. Reducing emissions significantly can be complex.

Trader Joe's may need to look at more local suppliers to achieve low emissions.

Waste Reduction

Waste reduction is a crucial aspect of sustainability, but it is challenging to implement effective waste reduction programs.

Trader Joe's must find ways to reduce waste without compromising customer experience.

As Trader Joe's tackles these challenges and finds creative solutions to reduce their environmental impact, it can continue to prioritize sustainability and positively impact the world.

Taking Hold of New Opportunities

Trader Joe's is well-positioned to develop a more robust integrated sustainability strategy to create value for all its stakeholders. As a quirky brand that focuses on unconventional business models and uses the store experience as marketing as part of the brand experience, there is no doubt that the brand is poised to be a leading driver of sustainability in the industry for a long time to come. To achieve this, they will need to take some significant steps forward.

I believe there is an excellent opportunity for them to rebrand or at least extend their branded business model of *'less is more.'* This has the opportunity to educate, inform, and cast a vision about how imperative it is to contribute to society and the environment's well-being.

Once again, drawn from my SWOT analysis, I have developed six opportunities for Trader Joe's to consider. I propose that the company use its current brand and business model of 'less is more' to redesign these concepts to serve as pillars of an integrated sustainability strategy.

Taking 'less is more' to a Whole New Level

Less Emissions

There are several ways Trader Joe's can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These include reviewing store energy consumption, exploring and investing in renewable energy, and continuing their efforts toward sustainable transportation.

The company can reduce emissions and energy usage by improving energy efficiency in its stores. They can achieve this by installing energy-efficient lighting and HVAC systems and investing in energy-efficient appliances and equipment in *all their USA stores by 2030*.

They could also explore more ways to incorporate renewable energy into their operations - including installing additional solar panels or using wind power.

Furthermore, they could reduce transportation emissions by optimizing shipping routes and using more fuel-efficient transportation options. They could also consider partnering with local farmers and producers to minimize product travel distance.

Less Waste

While Trader Joe's has reduced packaging waste, there is room for improvement. They could explore alternative packaging materials, such as compostable or biodegradable options, or offer more bulk items to reduce the packaging needed. They could also use their 561 stores across America (ScrapeHero, n.d.) to inspire recycling. For example, every store could have prominent recycling containers for customers.

Less Meat

Trader Joe's has the opportunity to be an industry leader in plant-based products. For example, they could create a line of plant-based products using their branding, such as "Trader Joe's Plant-Based Burgers," emphasizing plant-based diets' health and environmental benefits. With their unique store-based marketing, they could easily apply their *"less is more"* business model to this issue and build a campaign that educates their stakeholders while delivering valuable products.

More Transparency

Trader Joe's has a huge opportunity to earn stakeholders' trust by pledging to be more transparent. The process starts with a commitment to producing an online annual sustainability report that defines the company's environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals and communicates its progress toward achieving them over time. It also involves voluntary disclosure of their supply chain and carbon emissions.

More Sustainable Sourcing

As a retailer, Trader Joe's can increase the percentage of sustainably sourced products they offer, including organic and locally sourced products. The company can also work with suppliers to reduce the impact of their operations on the environment - including promoting regenerative agriculture and reducing water use.

More Ambitious Sustainable Goals

When setting sustainable goals, Trader Joe's has a huge opportunity to go 'all in' on sustainability. I recommend that the team hire a sustainability consultant to apply all four sustainability rules and align with Future-Fit Business Break-Even goals. As an already loved American grocery store, especially for the 20-45-year-olds - this ambition will propel its popularity and secure its reputation in the industry.

Conclusion

My hope is that this report has been informative and inspiring to the Trader Joe's team, looking at ways the company can move towards a more robust integrated sustainability strategy. Trader Joe's is a compelling case. It falls behind in sustainability ratings, yet its potential remains vast if it takes the appropriate bold steps to improve its environmental impact and become a leader in sustainable practices.

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