

Learn from Associations That Are Global Sustainability Leaders



October 20, 2017

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Most organizations need sustainability support, and associations are uniquely positioned to guide them and promote their efforts globally. Here are a few examples for how to get started.

Look around and you'll see that there are many trade associations today that have stepped up to play a role as global sustainability leaders. Associations often act as stewards for their industries and the environment, bringing a diverse group of members together **to drive change**.

Think of the potential of businesses working together to improve resource utilization and environmental sustainability with the support and resources of an industry partner. Often associations lead without mandates by responding to the needs and interests of their members.

To better understand how associations can be leaders in global sustainability movements, here are three examples from three different industries where associations led the way:

By creating resource hubs. National Restaurant Association (NRA) members are diverse. They can be small or large businesses, private or public, and operate nationally, globally, regionally, or locally. Some restaurant members are sustainability leaders, and others are just beginning their journeys, struggling with global issues, such as food waste, consumer interest in clean and local foods, and laws and infrastructure related to recycling and composting.

The NRA promotes restaurant sustainability by serving as a resource hub for its members. The **NRA's sustainability program** offers solutions that help restaurants reduce their costs and environmental impacts. Research reports, webinars, and guidance documents all help members address key sustainability topics. The NRA also organizes Sustainability Executive Study Group meetings, which bring restaurant professionals together to address sustainability challenges collaboratively. Another sustainability touchpoint is the annual NRA Show, an industry-wide event that showcases sustainability education, eco-cooking trends, and efficient kitchen technology.

The NRA also supports its members on sustainability by collaborating extensively with other industry associations and sustainability experts. For example, the NRA partners with the Grocery Manufacturers Association and the Food Marketing Institute on the **Food Waste Reduction Alliance** initiative to tackle food waste.

In addition, every state has a state restaurant association, which serves as an arm of the NRA to advocate for sustainability efforts on a local level. State restaurant associations reinforce the sustainability efforts of the NRA by sharing information across their social media platforms and in their own member newsletters. They are also well positioned to focus on local sustainability issues. For example, the Georgia Restaurant Association serves on a task force with the city of Atlanta to improve composting regulations and related infrastructure. This type of collaboration enables state associations to support restaurants at the local level and publicize new community solutions that might be leveraged nationally and globally.



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By developing sustainability tools. Big box retailers like Walmart, Walgreens, Target, and Costco came together and focused on the material impacts of their industry, raising the bar on sustainability management. The Retail Industry Leaders Association began focusing on sustainability approximately 10 years ago as a way to support members. Through member engagement, RILA learned that the biggest challenge for retailers was managing the environmental impacts of their operations. The industry needed tools to help guide and improve their sustainability performance.

In response, RILA developed the **Retail Sustainability Management Leadership Model**, which outlines specific dimensions of environmental performance and pathways for progress. The model is a tool that members can use to develop and mature sustainability programs and facilitate conversations about funding, training, and obtaining leadership buy-in.

RILA **also released another management tool** that focused specifically on energy management, because member data and surveys revealed that they needed additional support in that area. Retailers use this tool and the sustainability management model to measure, manage, and report performance and two-year performance outlooks to RILA.

In turn, RILA uses member data to publish case studies and periodic reports that showcase members' sustainability successes and address their sustainability challenges. The association also conducts separate research to support a resource library and organizes an annual sustainability conference. All of these efforts supply members with the tools they need to improve sustainability performance worldwide.

By publishing sustainability reports. U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance represents nearly every farmer and rancher in America through its more than 100 farm and commodity organizations and agricultural partners. Many of the farmers and ranchers represented by these groups are family-owned businesses.

The agricultural partners—seed, animal health and equipment companies—include both public and private companies. Farmers, ranchers, and USFRA's affiliates would say that they are committed to the long-term health of their land and animals and that, therefore, sustainability is essential to their businesses, especially as they increasingly do business worldwide. Not surprisingly, they define sustainability and sustainability progress in different ways, depending on their crop or livestock yield and production methods.

USFRA leads globally by tackling the difficult question, “What does sustainability mean for the agricultural industry?” Its **sustainability report** was the industry’s first-ever broad-reaching effort to engage and educate farmers, ranchers, food companies, food influencers and other stakeholders on sustainable farming and ranching practices and related effects on water, soil, air, and habitat. USFRA reported on extensive research, including a sustainability survey of farmers and ranchers and a voter poll on perceptions of agricultural sustainability. The report included a snapshot of key commodity practices and sustainability success stories, which gave a collective voice to farmers and ranchers. Going forward, USFRA is positioned to continue to inform and educate farmers and ranchers on best practices and evolving stakeholder expectations.

Think about how your association promotes global sustainability, and what more it could do through a resource hub, sustainability tools, or report. Or choose your own path for supporting members’ sustainability needs and interests. Whichever approach you choose, your association can become a leader in industry-wide sustainability movements.

Tags:

 **GLOBALIZATION**

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