

Sustainability Management – Final Case Study
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Sustainability at Chipotle

Background on the Organization:

Chipotle Mexican Grill is an international fast-food restaurant chain that originated in Denver, Colorado. Since its founding in July 1993, Chipotle found its niche in the fast-casual restaurant industry, attracting patrons with its distinctive Mexican-inspired customizable menu. Chipotle aims to be known for its steadfast commitment to ethical sourcing and ensuring that its cuisine remains free from artificial additives such as colors, flavors, or preservatives.

The draw of the restaurant is its curation of a menu that accommodates individual preferences. Tacos, salads, bowls, and burritos are just a few of the foods that Chipotle serves which are fully customizable. This assortment accommodates a broad range of palates and appetites, making Chipotle a go-to spot for a variety of customers. Chipotle stands out in the business for its constant dedication to sourcing high-quality and responsibly farmed ingredients. Buoyed by their slogan “food with integrity,” Chipotle has been championing food source transparency within its supply chain. The company seeks to bridge the gap between the source of its ingredients and the consumer's plate. This transparency not only fosters trust with its patrons but also aligns with the growing consumer demand for ethically sourced and environmentally conscious dining options.

The company is currently headquartered in Newport Beach, California. Chipotle has grown into a giant in the fast-food industry with a growing network of 3,236 restaurants across the United States. Their global footprint is more modest with 34 locations in Canada and 23 scattered across Europe. As of August 16, 2023, Chipotle is driven by a workforce of over 100,000 employees.

Chipotle faced a legal setback that profoundly impacted the company's trajectory and reputation, spurring transformative changes in its operational landscape. The lawsuit stemmed from allegations of food safety misconduct in light of foodborne illness outbreaks. From 2015 to 2018, over 1,100 restaurant-goers were determined to have fallen ill from Chipotle's mishandled produce. The company was charged with two counts of violating the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act for “adulterating food while held for sale after shipment in interstate commerce,” according to prosecutors (Ortiz). This not only tarnished the company's reputation as a healthy fast-food option, but also triggered a shift in its approach to quality control, supply chain management, and overall corporate responsibility. Chipotle agreed to pay a fine of \$25 million, the largest ever imposed on a food safety case, and comply with an improved food safety program to resolve the charges and avoid conviction.

In response to the lawsuit and the ensuing public scrutiny, Chipotle undertook a comprehensive overhaul of its operational protocols. The company implemented rigorous measures to fortify food safety and hygiene standards across its entire network of restaurants. This proactive stance was not only a reactive response to legal challenges, but also a strategic commitment to regain the trust of its customers and restore its reputation. Chipotle bolstered its training programs for

employees, emphasizing stringent adherence to industry best practices. This move aimed not only to rectify past mistakes but also to instill a culture of vigilance and responsibility within the organization, ensuring that every member of the Chipotle team became a guardian of food safety. Chipotle is still recovering from this lawsuit's hit to its reputation.

In an effort to assuage public concerns and showcase its dedication to transparency, Chipotle revamped its communication strategies. The company took steps to keep the public informed about the corrective actions being implemented, including starting to release annual sustainability reports. This commitment to transparency extended to its supply chain, where Chipotle sought to provide consumers with detailed insights into the sourcing and quality control measures applied to its ingredients. The suit prompted a reevaluation of corporate values, with a renewed emphasis on prioritizing the well-being of its customers and reinforcing its commitment to delivering a safe and exceptional dining experience.

Definition of Sustainability in this Organization:

Chipotle's commitment to sustainability extends beyond just environmental considerations. The company adopts a more holistic approach that addresses food, animals, people, and the environment. Chipotle defines sustainability broadly, incorporating non-environmental factors such as internal promotions, meal donations, bonuses, and tuition assistance (“Sustainability At Chipotle”).

Chipotle has introduced the "Cultivate Next" initiative, a venture fund with an initial size of \$50 million. This fund is dedicated to financing Series B stage companies that align with Chipotle's strategic priorities, including restaurant operations, technology and innovation, the Food with Integrity mission, and enhancing consumer access and convenience.

The company has a standard definition of sustainability; Chipotle has established clear ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) goals, showcasing achievements in various areas. For instance, the company purchased 57 million pounds of organic, transitional, and/or locally grown ingredients in 2022, demonstrating its commitment to responsible sourcing. The company also emphasizes diversity within its internal pipeline of candidates, achieving a notable increase to 63% in 2022. Chipotle also successfully reduced Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions to 13% below the 2019 baseline.

Through the “Chip in & Dish Out” initiatives, the company actively participates in philanthropy. The volunteer-based employee match project called “Chip In” matches qualifying volunteer hours with a monetary payment in order to promote employee engagement. “Dish Out” is a matching program that matches a qualified employee's donation to a nonprofit, increasing their total giving. Chipotle also runs programs like the “Harvest Program,” in which 100% of new restaurant locations are involved in food contributions. Chipotle understands and demonstrates the importance of the impact of its supply chain.

Chipotle also demonstrates a commitment to transparency by disclosing details about its sustainability initiatives (Bowman). Interestingly, the company's sustainability choices exhibit a

more limited focus on customers and stakeholders, instead concentrating more on the workplace environment and selection of suppliers. A prime example of the changes to the workplace environment is the thorough Food Safety Compliance program. This program underlines Chipotle's commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of its patrons following a \$25 million fine for the company's role in foodborne illness outbreaks (Office of Public Affairs). Despite setbacks, Chipotle continues to be proactive and takes the initiative to manage its supply chain, cut greenhouse gas emissions, divert waste from landfills, and adopt cutting-edge solutions to improve sustainability throughout business operations.

Leadership Organization Structure & Capacity:

Lisa Shibata serves as Director of Sustainability for Chipotle. She is an external hire who has been working at Chipotle since May 2022; previously, she worked at The Walt Disney Company for 15 years, as its Senior Manager, Enterprise Social Responsibility for nearly 9 years. Shibata is respected in the field and has proven her ability to execute sustainability measures. At Disney, she "was responsible for investments in nature-based projects and water stewardship. She also led supplier engagement efforts for the paper sourcing policy and assessing value chain impacts to inform Scope 3 ambitions. Lisa has over 20 years of experience developing sustainability programs" (Cologgi). She aims to implement a very intense strategy that shows employees and suppliers the company's dedication to becoming carbon neutral by 2050 ("Cultivating a Better World with Lisa Shibata of Chipotle – Impact Podcast with John Shegerian").

Chipotle's board plays a pivotal role in guiding the company's sustainability efforts, with one notable member being Mauricio Gutierrez. Gutierrez is the President and Chief Executive Officer of NRG Energy, Inc. His presence on the board adds valuable expertise in the energy sector, aligning with Chipotle's commitment to sustainability and interest in shifting towards renewable energy sources.

Brian Niccol, the Chairman and CEO of Chipotle demonstrates this support through various channels. Sustainability is prominently featured in the company's mission statement and values, visible on the organization's website, and frequently mentioned in public speaking engagements. Niccol plays an active role in addressing sustainability in press releases, internal memorandums, email announcements, and newsletter updates. The commitment to sustainability is further reinforced by dedicated investments and allocations within the operational budgets.

Sustainability at Chipotle does not sit in a specific department in the company, and executives from various departments are involved in the efforts. The Cultivate Foundation, a key component of Chipotle's sustainability initiatives, is comprised of influential figures within the company including Niccol, Laurie Schalow, Chief Corporate Affairs and Safety Officer, Michael McGawn, VP Deputy of General Counsel, and Nicole West, VP of Digital Strategy.

Laurie Schalow, who serves as the President of The Cultivate Foundation, has a diverse background that includes her role as Chief Corporate Affairs and Safety Officer at Chipotle. Schalow's status as an internal hire showcases the company's commitment to promoting internal talent while also placing known and approachable members of Chipotle's workplace into these

important sustainability roles. Her trajectory within Chipotle, from Chief Communications Officer to her current role, underlines the organization's confidence in her ability to drive and implement sustainability measures. Her extensive experience in both public and corporate affairs positions her well to lead the Foundation's efforts. The Foundation's Executive Director Erin Wolford, Secretary Michael McGawn, and Treasurer Adam Rymer work collectively with Schalow to advance the Foundation's mission. The team launches marketing campaigns, measures and monitors consumption levels, creates annual sustainability reports, invests in relationships with sustainable suppliers, and curates the company's image as a restaurant at the forefront of sustainability efforts.

The composition of the Cultivate Foundation's leadership underscores the company's commitment to sustainability, with individuals who bring a wealth of experience from various sectors, ensuring a holistic and strategic approach to achieving sustainability goals.

Strategy and Metrics:

Since 2001, Chipotle has operated with the “food with integrity” slogan, although transparency did not follow this until more recently. While Chipotle has been setting high standards lately for sustainability transparency in the restaurant industry, they did not formalize a sustainability progress report until 2018. Chipotle did not waste time playing catch-up and quickly became a leader in the industry. In an interview, Schalow, Chipotle's Chief Corporate Affairs and Safety Officer, noted that “the principles [Chipotle was] founded on – how food is raised or grown or harvested really mattering – naturally lead to ESG efforts. Our founding codes came before CSR [corporate social responsibility] or ESG was a thing” (Kelso).

The organization's sustainability goals are measured in three main sections: Food & Animals, People, and Environment.

In the realm of Food & Animals, the organization aspires to contribute \$5 million over the next five years to support young farmers; they have allocated over \$1 million to this program since the initial commitment. The company also aims to convert over 400 acres of conventional farmland to organic by 2025. By partnering with growers, they have successfully converted over 214 acres thus far. Chipotle also tracks the purchase of organic, transitional, and/or locally grown ingredients; this past year, the company purchased over 58.3 million pounds of these products.

Sustainability within the People section of the organization's efforts is measured comprehensively. Beyond just their diversity metrics, the Restaurant Support Center launched the Voice of Employee (VoE) surveys in 2022. These surveyed over 88,000 employees and yielded a 66% response rate. This feedback is intended to help Chipotle “foster an inclusive culture” by learning of the biggest issues employees are facing (“Cultivate a Better World 2022 Sustainability Report”). The surveys found that 85% of Chipotle's employees shared that they had what they needed to perform their jobs effectively, higher than the global benchmark of 79%. The survey also found that the employees' commitment score was 83%, compared to the global benchmark of 74%. Employee enthusiasm for Chipotle's values and purpose was quantified at 80% for hourly employees and 89% for RSC and field support.

Chipotle has actively worked to improve employee satisfaction after the foodborne illness lawsuit also brought to light the work culture that encouraged working while sick. A prosecutor in the case noted that a norovirus outbreak affecting 141 people in 2015 was likely due to poor management and the requirement that employees continue working after vomiting in the restaurant, a violation of company policy (Ortiz). Since then, the work culture has improved greatly and the rules preventing such occurrences have been reinstated into the culture.

The “always on” employee listening program which was instituted this year indicates a commitment to collect real-time, actionable feedback, fostering a dynamic approach to understanding employee sentiment. The organization intends to help shape programs proactively based on continuous feedback rather than relying on annual surveys. As management compensation is tied to sustainability targets, each level of the company is incentivized to establish and enact sustainable practices.

In the Environmental sphere, Chipotle is largely focused on suppliers. The company seeks to baseline food waste throughout the supply chain this year; they have initiated progress by surveying distribution centers on waste management practices. Chipotle also instituted the target of a 50% reduction in Scope 1, 2, and 3 greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Current progress reflects a 13% reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions but a 26% increase in Scope 3 emissions. The company’s focus on Scope 1 and 2 emissions led to oversight this past year of Scope 3 and will likely lead to a shift in emissions priorities going forward. Chipotle has also expanded its focus to include biodiversity. The restaurant chain aims to identify key biodiversity hotspots by 2025. Thus far, progress entails engagement with suppliers on management practices and biodiversity impacts. The company has also achieved 100% American Humane certification for chicken. The organization faces challenges in waste reduction, with a goal of 5% reduction in waste to landfill by 2025 but a current 27% increase. Nonetheless, the organization has made strides in waste diversion, increasing 77% from 2020 (“Cultivate a Better World 2022 Sustainability Report”). The ongoing progress demonstrates a commitment to sustainability goals, although continuous monitoring and adjustments will be required to ensure alignment with long-term strategic objectives.

Chipotle is also committed to keeping its executives accountable for its sustainability success or lack thereof. In 2021, Chipotle announced a new ESG metric that ties the compensation of its executives to its ESG goals. Initially, 10% of each exec’s annual incentive bonus was tied to their progress. This past year, this percentage increased to 15% (Sustainable Brands Staff), proving that Chipotle’s commitment to sustainability and accountability is shared by the executive team and that the burden of these initiatives is not solely placed on employees and suppliers.

Looking forward, Chipotle has unveiled all-electric design plans to help the company reach its sustainability goals, featuring the installation of solar panels on their restaurants. This upcoming year, Chipotle will launch all-electric designs in over 100 of its new locations. Locations have already opened in Gloucester, Virginia, Jacksonville, Florida, and Castle Rock, Colorado (Lucas). This initiative is part of Chipotle’s goal to cut its greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030.

Relations with Suppliers and Partners:

Some of Chipotle's largest suppliers include Niman Ranch, Petaluma Creamery, McKaskle Family Farm, and Meister Cheese ("Chipotle Announces Virtual Farmers' Market Powered By Shopify - Jun 30, 2020").

Niman Ranch shares the same sustainability goals, aiming to not only preserve the land but also to ensure that their farmers and ranchers are economically viable. Like Chipotle, Niman Ranch also breaks down its definition of sustainability into three sections: environmental, economic, and social. Environmental sustainability includes the use of alternative energy sources, raising fewer animals per acre, and rotational grazing, economic sustainability is paying farmers well with access to a national marketplace to sell their livestock, and social sustainability means keeping generations of family farmers on their land and in their local communities ("Sustainable Farming and Ranching Practices").

Petaluma Creamery is a family farm that incorporated solar energy into its new production and distribution facility in Sonoma County, California. This eliminated an estimated 550,000 lbs of CO₂ from the atmosphere annually (SunPower Corporation). Their commitment to long-term sustainability did not account for the decreasing demand facing the dairy industry and even before its expansion and renovation, they had been accumulating nearly \$675,000 in debt and it is unclear if they are still in operation (Carruthers).

McKaskle Family Farm, producers of popcorn, rice, soybeans, and wheat, was at the forefront of non-GMO and organic farming in the 1990s. The farm has struggled for its commitment to sustainability, with its non-dicamba-resistant soybeans unable to grow due to the volatile pesticide that can carry 15 miles in the wind. Organic farming was no longer an option. McKaskle teamed up with Nashville-based AgriCapture who was beginning a carbon credit program. Despite no longer holding the commitment to organic farming, the farm is now certified climate-friendly and has cut water use by 50%; looking forward, McKaskle intends to utilize allelopathic technology to have plants control weeds without the need for herbicides (Bennett and Scheve). This family farm has a vastly different approach to sustainability compared to Chipotle, as their methods for reducing a negative environmental impact relies on carbon credits and decreasing consumption. Despite different methods, Chipotle's ideals and goals still align with this farm.

Meister Cheese, a family-owned company in Wisconsin and Iowa, prides themselves on high animal welfare standards, its lack of added hormones, sustainable farming, and manufacturing practices. They use wood chips as fuel for their boiler system to generate steam for cheese and whey production and methane gas to generate electricity (Slipstream).

Rather than setting requirements for its suppliers, Chipotle selects its suppliers for their sustainability and trusts them to uphold their ideals. To incentivize remaining sustainable, Chipotle offers education, scholarships, grants, and three-year contracts as its way of empowering the next generation of farmers. Chipotle contributed over \$500,000 to support these farmers through the National Young Farmers Coalition ("Chipotle Announces Virtual Farmers'

Market Powered By Shopify - Jun 30, 2020”). The Chipotle Supplier Code of Conduct only requires that suppliers “comply with environmental laws and regulations and conduct their operations in ways that conserve natural resources” (“Corporate Governance”).

Chipotle’s position as a powerful consumer gives them the power to decide which suppliers to partner with, so the company’s method of ensuring compliance with sustainability goals is simply the power and knowledge that Chipotle can change suppliers if needed.

Resources for Sustainability:

The sustainability function within Chipotle is supported by professionals with diverse expertise. Though sustainability is largely decentralized within the company, the organization invests significantly in personnel dedicated to sustainability efforts. The quantity of employees dedicated to sustainability is not reported, though each employee and supplier at Chipotle is expected to uphold their sustainability standards and strive for their goals.

Chipotle’s commitment to transparency does not extend to publicized budget information. While the specific costs are not publicly disclosed, Chipotle’s move towards transitioning its restaurant equipment to all-electric represents a capital investment in sustainable practices. In 2022, Chipotle spent 1,951.147 (in millions USD) on Property, Plant, and Equipment. This is an increase from 1,769.278 in 2021 (“Chipotle Mexican Grill Balance Sheet 2009-2023 | CMG | MacroTrends”). While unknown what percentage was allocated towards sustainable equipment, this annually increasing number signals a long-term commitment to capital investments which is indicative of a proactive approach to sustainability, showcasing the organization’s dedication to fostering positive environmental and social impacts.

Importance of Sustainability:

Sustainability is an integral part of Chipotle’s organizational identity. These values align with Chipotle’s consumer base as well as its investors. The company’s commitment to sustainability is evident through various strategic initiatives, from transitioning restaurant equipment to all-electric to sourcing organic and locally grown ingredients. Early on, Chipotle committed itself to ethical and sustainable sourcing. They have since expanded this focus to include Energy Management Systems and renewable energy (Kelso). The success of making sustainability a routine within the organization can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, Chipotle has demonstrated a clear organizational commitment through the integration of sustainability into its mission statement and values. This commitment is echoed by top leadership, including CEO Brian Niccol, who actively supports and communicates sustainability efforts. Moreover, the use of measurable and specific goals, such as achieving 100% American Humane certification for chicken and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, reflects a strategic approach to sustainability. The company’s routine monitoring, objective evaluation, and investment in sustainable practices contribute to its success in aligning organizational routines with sustainability goals. The transparency of Chipotle’s goals and the leveraging of executive bonuses promotes accountability. Chipotle, in its marketing strategy and packaging, aims to be the top choice of

consumers for quick and easy sustainable dining, and they are willing to make big investments to do so.

The Future of Sustainability in the Organization:

The future of sustainability at Chipotle is seen through a strategic shift in the operational aspect of its restaurants. The company, traditionally reliant on natural gas equipment, is taking big steps to mitigate its environmental impact. Chipotle's transition away from natural gas and embracing the use of all-electric equipment in its restaurants, including rice cookers, cook lines, and stoves, ("Cultivating a Better World with Lisa Shibata of Chipotle – Impact Podcast with John Shegerian") is the biggest investment for the future that Chipotle has demonstrated thus far. This initiative aims to reduce emissions significantly, as the adoption of all-electric equipment allows Chipotle to transition completely towards renewable energy sources and eliminate, or at least greatly reduce, its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions associated with fossil fuels. The company is committed to the integration of sustainable practices into its expansion plans, intending to build 100 new restaurants that will operate entirely on electric power in the coming year. This forward-looking approach aligns with broader industry trends toward cleaner and more sustainable energy use in the restaurant sector. To remain competitive, Chipotle needs to emphasize the importance of reducing Scope 3 emissions. With the continued support of executives, consumers, and investors, Chipotle has the potential to set new standards for the fast-food industry going forward.

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