General Mills: Environmental Sustainability

Our history

General Mills’ environmental sustainability mission is to protect and conserve the natural resource base that its business depends on by continuously improving its environmental performance.

The company’s commitment to sustainability dates back decades. As early as the 1930s, General Mills was using recycled paperboard packaging, and the company’s Green Giant brand was using crop rotation practices. This foundation evolved into integrating environmental sustainability initiatives into other areas of its business.
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Our impact

General Mills strives to be a good steward of the environment. Environmental responsibility is a core company value, and its business depends on the present and future availability of natural resources. General Mills has implemented innovative ways to minimize its environmental footprint by identifying opportunities to incorporate sustainable strategies, processes and products throughout its operations.

Our goals

In 2005, General Mills established several global environmental sustainability goals to measure its progress in solid waste generation, water use, greenhouse gas emissions, and energy consumption. In 2010, the company established new, more aggressive environmental sustainability goals, including goals for North American transportation and packaging.

**40%**

Improve 40 percent of global product **packaging** volume through modifications to weight, recycled or renewable content or truck loading optimization.

**20%**

Reduce **greenhouse gas** emissions rate by 20 percent by implementing processes that reduce overall energy usage in manufacturing plants and by using renewable energy sources when feasible.

**35%**

Reduce the fuel used to ship each pound of product by 35 percent in its North American operations by streamlining **transportation** systems.

**20%**

Reduce **water** usage rate by 20 percent by continuing to track areas of high usage and identify opportunities to target water conservation.

**20%**

Reduce **energy** usage rate by 20 percent by expanding and embedding energy usage reduction practices throughout manufacturing processes.

**50%**

Reduce **solid waste** rate generation by 50 percent through efficiencies in manufacturing operations to avoid generating the waste and optimize material use. The company’s waste management program will be further enhanced by using material from renewable resources or recycled materials, and reducing the amount of waste that is sent to landfills and by finding ways to recycle waste or use it for other purposes.

*The solid waste, greenhouse gas and energy goals use a baseline of 2005; the packaging and transportation goals are measured from a fiscal 2009 baseline and the water goal is measured from a 2006 baseline.*
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Sustainability case studies

**Waste**

General Mills’ Albuquerque facility is currently recycling 90 percent of its output – up from 48 percent in 2010. Every month, about 33 fewer tons of waste go into an area landfill near the plant, thanks to an expanded recycling program that includes corrugated boxes, carton cores, sacks and other items that typically get tossed out.

**Energy**

General Mills uses a biomass burner to burn oat hulls left over from the milling process at its Fridley, Minn., facility, which makes oat flour used in Cheerios and other products. The biomass burner produces 90 percent of the steam needed to heat the plant and manufacture the oat flour, reducing the plant’s carbon footprint by about 21 percent. General Mills’ oat hulls are also burned by a local biomass plant, generating enough electricity to power 17,000 homes.

**Greenhouse Gases**

Conserving energy is a priority at General Mills’ plant in Arras, France. All suppliers are local, which results in fresher ingredients as well as fuel savings and a smaller carbon footprint. The facility also optimized its air conditioning system to improve temperature control, ventilation and humidity, saving 587 megawatt hours per year of gas and 824 megawatt hours per year of electricity. Switching to LED lighting in its cold storage area saved another 50 megawatt hours of electricity.

**Water**

General Mills’ agriculture team has saved 1.1 billion gallons of water by working with local growers in central Mexico to encourage the use of environmentally friendly drip irrigation. Drip irrigation uses about half the water of conventional furrow irrigation. General Mills is providing interest-free loan for equipment purchase.

**Transportation**

By consolidating heavier canned Green Giant vegetables produced in France with lighter Nature Valley bars and Old El Paso Mexican meal kits made in Spain, General Mills is able to pack seagoing containers more efficiently and transport them to the UK and Ireland. This has already trimmed more than 2.3 million road miles per year by shipping 90 percent of UK-bound goods by sea.

**Packaging**

In January 2011, General Mills started wrapping the packaging around chewy Nature Valley and Fiber One bars a little tighter. Trimming the pouch size reduced the amount of wrapping – a metalized flexible laminate material – by more than 200,000 pounds a year.
To minimize greenhouse gas emissions, General Mills is using a new computer-based transportation system to optimize its shipping network, saving millions of gallons of fuel per year. This centralized system allows the company to map out the multiple destinations for its products and put more products on each truck. It’s expected to save more than US$2 million annually and reduce the company’s environmental impact.

In September 2011, General Mills began an organic food waste collection program at the company’s world headquarters in Minneapolis. Approximately two tons of food waste generated from the employee cafeteria, Betty Crocker Kitchens and Culinary Center, is being composted each week, saving it from the landfill and reducing greenhouse gases in the process.

With guidance from General Mills, more and more farmers from Central Mexico are using organic compost from nearby chicken farms – instead of energy-intensive synthetic fertilizer – to spread on broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and celery. The organic manure was used on about 4,000 acres in fiscal 2011. The switch is estimated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 12,000 tons per year, the equivalent of taking 2,000 cars off the road.

Water used to cool soup cans in the final stage of the canning process is now being captured and recycled at the General Mills’ plant in Vineland, N.J. This saves 56 million gallons of water per year. Furthermore, the plant is able to offset energy use by extracting and transferring the heat coming from the used water into other processes. This has lowered energy usage by 16 percent.