

Many Shades of Green

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I weaseled out of a Black Friday spent weaving through aisles of hand-painted South American pottery and fair-trade silken scarves. Thinking of excuses to avoid being dragged on a fair-trade shopping excursion in a second-tier city's Granola District is, regrettably, part of the cost of living when one chooses — as I have — to surround oneself with strident members of the latte-sipping, Prius-driving set.

In stark contrast to my friends who did, indeed, hit these stores on Friday, I sat at home in my pajamas, eating Cheetos and drinking pink lemonade, watching whatever crummy TV marathon was on TBS and buying all my holiday gifts online.

Here's the thing: I live in a small apartment *on purpose*. I don't own a car *on purpose*. I have those annoying little fold-up bags in my purse for use at my local grocer. Instead of doing those things, friends of mine choose to do their holiday shopping at Sven's Handmade Essentials (okay, that might not be a real place).

[Discussing sustainability in the business sector](#) [1], Dr. Lea Borkenhagen, spokesperson for Oxfam, an anti-poverty non-profit, recently suggested that food companies are at the forefront of sustainability efforts. She discussed the ways in which manufacturing companies can source ingredients from multiple small-scale farmers and suppliers, thus reducing food insecurity and leading to a more efficient use of food.

There is no way to get around the fact that manufacturing is a resource-heavy industry. That said, I've seen food manufacturers implement innovative plans to cut waste, reduce energy usage and become useful and important members of their communities. My inbox is daily flooded with new products that demonstrate the industry's commitment to continuing environmental progress — recycled plastic

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containers, high-efficiency compressed air systems and shipping packages that can go right from the truck to the grocery store shelf.

Companies like Kettle Foods, which has been featured on the cover of *Food Manufacturing*, takes its commitment to environmental stewardship seriously, installing wind turbines on the roof of their LEED-certified manufacturing plant, repurposing used vegetable oil as fuel for a fleet of biodiesel company cars and sourcing nearly all of their potatoes from within 200 miles of their plant in southern Wisconsin.

Food Manufacturing has also reported on PWP Industries, which began [rolling out food-grade recycled plastic packaging](#) [2]. Now, food manufacturers can package their foods in material made from recycled soda bottles, creating a materials cycle that begins and ends with the food and beverage industry.

A food company may have a greater eco-footprint than a software company, but food companies are feeding the world by increasingly efficient and inexpensive means and are taking up the mantle of environmental responsibility that goes beyond the eco-friendly initiatives they've already implemented.

And I guess that's the point. We've all found different ways to be as responsible as we can. I choose to ride the bus to work, and my friends choose to peruse bamboo tables lined with "ethically manufactured" authentically beaded native headwear. Some companies have found a way to deliver their content digitally instead of producing physical products. Since such efforts are not available options to food manufacturers, the food industry has voluntarily ramped up efforts to find new ways to source energy and reuse their food waste.

Responsibility and sustainability have many faces, and the food manufacturing industry is, even in the infancy of the sustainability movement, paving roads toward environmental stewardship — and changing the way we think about sustainability in the process.

How do you choose to be green? Bamboo tables or bus rides? Send me an e-mail at krystal.gabert@advantagemedia.com [3].

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<http://www.chem.info/blogs/2010/12/many-shades-green>

Links:

[1] <http://www.dairyreporter.com/Publications/Food-Beverage-Nutrition/FoodNavigator.com/Financial-Industry/Food-sector-at-the-forefront-of-sustainability-says-Oxfam/>

[2] <http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/scripts/Products-Plastic-Moves-up-the-Food-Chain-12839.asp>

[3] <mailto:krystal.gabert@advantagemedia.com>