

Unilever's sustainable living plan - update

The Unilever Sustainable Living Plan, first published in November 2010, has published an update on its progress. As part of the update, it announced that by the end of 2012 it will reach its target of 100% certified sustainable palm oil covered by Green Palm Certificates, a full three years ahead of schedule.



The plan broke new ground by committing to take responsibility for the company's impacts right across the value chain, from the sourcing of raw materials all the way through to the consumer's use of its products to cook, clean and wash.

Whilst this is strong progress, the company recognises that the Green Palm Scheme is only a step along the road towards sustainable palm oil, not the end game. Although it will be even more difficult to achieve, it has now set a new target of purchasing all its palm oil from traceable sources by 2020. This means it will be able to track all the certified oil it buys back to the plantation on which it was originally grown.

To help achieve this goal, it announced that it is in advanced stages of discussions with the Indonesian government for investing over €100m in a large processing plant for palm oil derivatives in Sumatra. This plant will not only cut back on transport and save money but it will make it easier to trace the sources of the palm oil used.

Unilever's performance against its sustainable living plan targets fall into three categories:

1. Areas where it is making good progress, such as:

- Sustainable sourcing - 24% of total agricultural raw materials now being sourced sustainably, versus 14% in 2010.
- Nutrition - over 90% of Unilever's leading spreads now contain less than one-third saturated fat.
- Renewable energy now contributes 20% of Unilever's total energy use. 100% of electricity purchased in Europe is now from renewable sources, and we have increased our use of biomass to fuel boilers in India and China.
- Safe drinking water - 35 million people have gained access to safe drinking water from Pureit water purifier since 2005.

2. Areas where it has had to consider carefully how to reach its targets, but is now ready to scale up. These include health and hygiene: Lifebuoy soap's hand washing programme reached 48 million people by the end of 2011 and new partnerships such as its 'train the trainer' approach in Indonesia will help it to go to the next level.
3. Areas where it is finding it difficult to make progress and will need to work with others to find solutions. This applies particularly to targets that require consumer behaviour change, such as reducing the use of heated water in showering and washing clothes, or encouraging people to eat foods with lower salt levels.

Unilever CEO, Paul Polman said, "In a world where temperatures are rising, energy is costing more, sanitation is worsening and food supply is less secure, companies can no longer sit on the sidelines waiting for governments to take action. We have to see ourselves as part of the solution to these problems. We believe that our future success depends upon being able to decouple our growth from our environmental footprint, while at the same time increasing our positive social impacts.

"Many of our goals look as daunting now as they did when we announced them, but you have to set uncomfortable targets if you are to really change things. Sustainable growth will be the only acceptable model of growth in the future, which is why we have put the sustainable living plan at the heart of our business strategy. Far from being a hindrance to our progress, we are now seeing increasing evidence that it can drive business growth. The company grew well in 2011, but what is encouraging is that the brands that put sustainability at the centre of their propositions, such as Lifebuoy soap or Persil/Omo Small & Mighty, grew faster than the average.

"It is also becoming ever clearer that we cannot tackle the big issues alone: much of our progress to date has come where we have worked with others. Finally, if we achieve our own sustainability targets but no one else follows, we will not have been truly successful. For that reason, we are working with other organizations such as the Consumer Goods Forum, World Economic Forum, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, governments, NGOs and others to drive change. We believe collaboration will become the only way of doing business in the future."

For more information, go to www.unilever.com/sustainable-living.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>