

Achieving Sustainability Certification

THE CHALLENGE

Articulating sustainability achievements can be challenging. While consumers, buyers, and regulators are increasingly demanding greater transparency around sustainability practices, what constitutes sustainability can vary across organizations. Costco, for example, emphasizes social accountability, while Walmart emphasizes environmental stewardship and climate change. Increasingly, however, the comprehensive definition of sustainability encompasses the “three Ps” of People, Planet, and Profit:



- **People** considerations include the treatment of workers, such as pay, benefits, and company recruiting practices.
- **Planet** refers to environmental issues, including water and energy efficiency, greenhouse gas emissions, waste reduction, healthy soils, and the promotion of biodiversity.
- **Profit** considerations include the long-term viability of the business such as succession planning, product diversification, risk management, and the preservation of farmland.

IMPACT – FINDING THE RIGHT APPROACH

California Giant, a large berry supplier that contracts with growing operations in multiple countries, approached Measure to Improve, LLC (MTI), to help identify an approach for responding to sustainability information requests, particularly those around social accountability. With MTI’s support, California Giant’s first step was to determine the best way to evaluate and share their progress.

MTI and California Giant agreed that, for a company’s claims and achievements to be credible, they needed an approach that included validation of both data and practices. MTI recommended California Giant work to achieve a reputable sustainability certification. Third-party certifications are one of the strongest ways to validate that a company is meeting legal requirements and going “above and beyond” expectations. In addition, certifications provide a standardized approach and recognizable logo which make them increasingly popular with consumers, buyers, and produce companies alike.

California Giant’s growers are distributed throughout the Western Hemisphere, so the right certification needed to be globally recognized and respected. After reviewing all the options, California Giant chose the comprehensive Sustainably Grown certification by SCS Global Services on two accounts. First, Costco, one of the company’s major buyers, agreed that the Sustainably Grown standard is compliant with their requirements. Second, California Giant recognized that taking a comprehensive approach will strengthen both the company and its growers, creating a competitive advantage.



Results

The pilot program at Satsuma Farms was a huge success. Rich Uto successfully completed his certification audit in summer 2020 and became the first Sustainably Grown certified strawberry grower in the world. California Giant selected Rich Uto's operation for the pilot because he was enthusiastic about his investments in sustainability and willing to work with MTI to document their compliance with the Sustainably Grown standard and make necessary changes to their practices and policies. California Giant can now include the Sustainably Grown logo on packaging for Satsuma Farms strawberries. This highlights the company's success to consumers and may attract additional buyers for Satsuma Farms' strawberries.

Kevin Warner, Manager, Sustainable Agriculture at SCS Global Services, was impressed by the team's work. ***“Rich Uto and his team at Satsuma Farms did a great job on their Sustainably Grown certification audit. At SCS we set a high bar for sustainability in agriculture with a thorough investigation of practices to ensure the protection of farmworkers, environmental sustainability, and the economic resilience of the farming operation. Satsuma Farms exceeded our expectations in meeting the stringent requirements of our standard. Working with Measure to Improve expedited the audit, saving time and money for the client, and ensuring a smooth process in certifying the world's first Sustainably Grown certified strawberries.”***

Achieving Sustainably Grown certification means addressing 372 indicators across four categories; more than half (192) are focused on social accountability. This made it an excellent choice for MTI's client, who wanted a specific focus on social issues.

“Some people make certification sound like it's impossible, but it's not if you have the right team. Working with the right people, including MTI, made the process go smoothly. Everyone brought their A game.”

Rich Uto
Owner, Satsuma Farms

“Sustainably Grown is a challenging certification, but it was the best one for Cal Giant because it aligns with our own long-term approach to sustainability. This certification reflects our commitment to treating the environment and the people involved in our supply chain right.”

Joe Barsi
President, California Giant

“Sustainability certifications provide third-party verification and a seal of approval that helps organizations effectively market their social, environmental, and ethical responsibility while avoiding the pitfalls of greenwashing. Certification is a worthwhile investment if it aligns with your business values and your customer's values.”

Nikki Cossio
CEO & Founder, Measure to Improve

MTI's Role

- **Select the Right Certification:** MTI developed a comparison of multiple standards to help California Giant select the one that best fit the company's culture and would help them credibly respond to sustainability surveys from multiple buyers. SCS Sustainably Grown fit the bill. This independent, third-party standard takes a holistic approach to sustainability, mirroring the people-planet-profit model also used by the client.



- **Proof of Concept:** MTI implemented a pilot program with one California Giant growing operation to assess the time and effort it would take and to capture best practices that can be used to roll-out the certification program companywide. Collecting and organizing all the information required for such a comprehensive standard can be overwhelming. MTI helped grower, Rich Uto, to collect, track and store all required information in a ready-to-audit format. By writing a sustainability plan and developing customized data collection tools, MTI helped Rich Uto get organized now, stay organized for future audits, and achieve his own sustainability goals.
- **Guide the Audit:** Despite disruptions from COVID-19, Rich Uto persevered, never wavering from the goal of certification. MTI supported him throughout the entire audit process, interpreting requirements, developing documents, and problem-solving. MTI's attention to detail ensured that the process, which is often rocky and stressful, was seamless for all involved.
- **Commitment to Client's Success:** MTI continues to work with California Giant, taking what was learned during the first certification and building resources to streamline the certification process for additional growing operations. As more growers have their product certified Sustainably Grown, the entire supply chain will benefit, from farm to consumer.

ABOUT MTI

Founded in 2014, Measure to Improve's mission is to help produce companies measure, improve, and credibly promote their sustainability efforts. Our clients include produce growers, packers, shippers, and industry associations across the United States. Our staff has a proven track record of helping companies identify and implement strategies to increase efficiency. By supporting clients in setting ambitious, but attainable, sustainability goals, MTI encourages progress that can be validated and marketed. MTI's projects address a variety of sustainability challenges, including water, energy, greenhouse gas emissions, waste, and social accountability.

About California Giant Berry Farms

More than 35 years ago, cousins Pat Riordan and Bill Moncovich teamed up with childhood best friend, Frank Saveria, and began to sell strawberries from a simple trailer in Watsonville, California. Years later, they grew to a global family of people who share their passion for strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries. From planting, growing, harvesting and shipping, California Giant values each and every team member who works to deliver the best quality berries while giving back to our communities and staying focused on their mission and core values: Community, Quality, Philanthropy, Fairness In All We Do and Mutual Respect.

About Satsuma Farms, LLC

Founded in 2016 by second generation farmer, Rich Uto, Satsuma Farms is a strategic grower-partner of California Giant Berry Farms. Providing guidance and a strong work ethic, Rich and his team are dedicated to sustainably growing conventional and organic strawberries on over 160 acres of land which is owned by California Giant in Watsonville, California. These values along with Rich's longstanding dedication to the agriculture industry have proven to be successful in providing year round high quality fresh berries.