

Walmart's sustainability initiative dramatically reduces environmental impact of agriculture

Nearly a decade after setting a series of [bold sustainability goals](#), Walmart has struggled to curb its climate pollution and buy more renewable energy. But the company has already changed the way food is grown around the world – curbing agricultural pollution, pushing healthier choices, supporting local growers and promoting transparency. And the world's largest retailer (fiscal year 2014 revenues: \$473 billion) is just getting started.

So what, exactly, are Walmart and its suppliers doing? A lot of things, around not just the environment but affordability, access to food for poor people, health and obesity, safety and transparency.

This week, for example, Walmart announced a partnership with United Suppliers, a cooperative of nearly 700 agricultural retailers across the US that sells seeds, fertilizers and crop protection products to farmers. United Suppliers said it would extend the reach of a program called Sustain, which is designed to reduce soil and nutrient runoff and climate emissions, to farmers who grow corn, soybeans, wheat and canola on 10m acres – more acreage than Walmart's better-known partners, like General Mills and Kellogg's, have pledged to better manage.

"They can help a farmer go through their practices and say, you can do better," explained Michelle Harvey, who leads Environmental Defense Fund's on-site corporate partnership with Walmart. Walmart, she said, has convinced the world's biggest food companies to focus on fertilizer which, when overused, pollutes waterways and needlessly increases greenhouse gases.

- Walmart will buy more local food in the U.S. and around the world. The company is buying more produce directly from small and medium farms, eliminating the middlemen and the costs they add. Using a pilot program in Costa Rica as a model, McMillon said the company has found a way to "reach small producers and get them into our system". He has taken a personal interest in the effort, visiting with farmers in Costa Rica, Ghana, Zambia and China.
- Walmart will help its customers eat better. The company has reduced sodium by 13 percent and sugar levels by 10 percent in its private-label products, and created a "Great for You" icon to point consumers to healthier food options. Working with its foundation, Walmart will provide nutrition education to 4 million U.S. households.
- Walmart will take a stab at protecting animal welfare by installing small cameras at pork production facilities. "We've asked our suppliers to put cameras on the farms so there is true visibility into the treatment of the animals," McLaughlin told me.

Interestingly, McMillon made a point of saying that Walmart wants to reduce not just the price of the food it sells, but its "true cost", which he said means that "we take into account things like greenhouse gases and how much water is used to produce a crop".

"Parts of the system are priced in," he said. "Other parts aren't."

Read full, original article: [Walmart's quest for low-cost and environmentally friendly food](#)