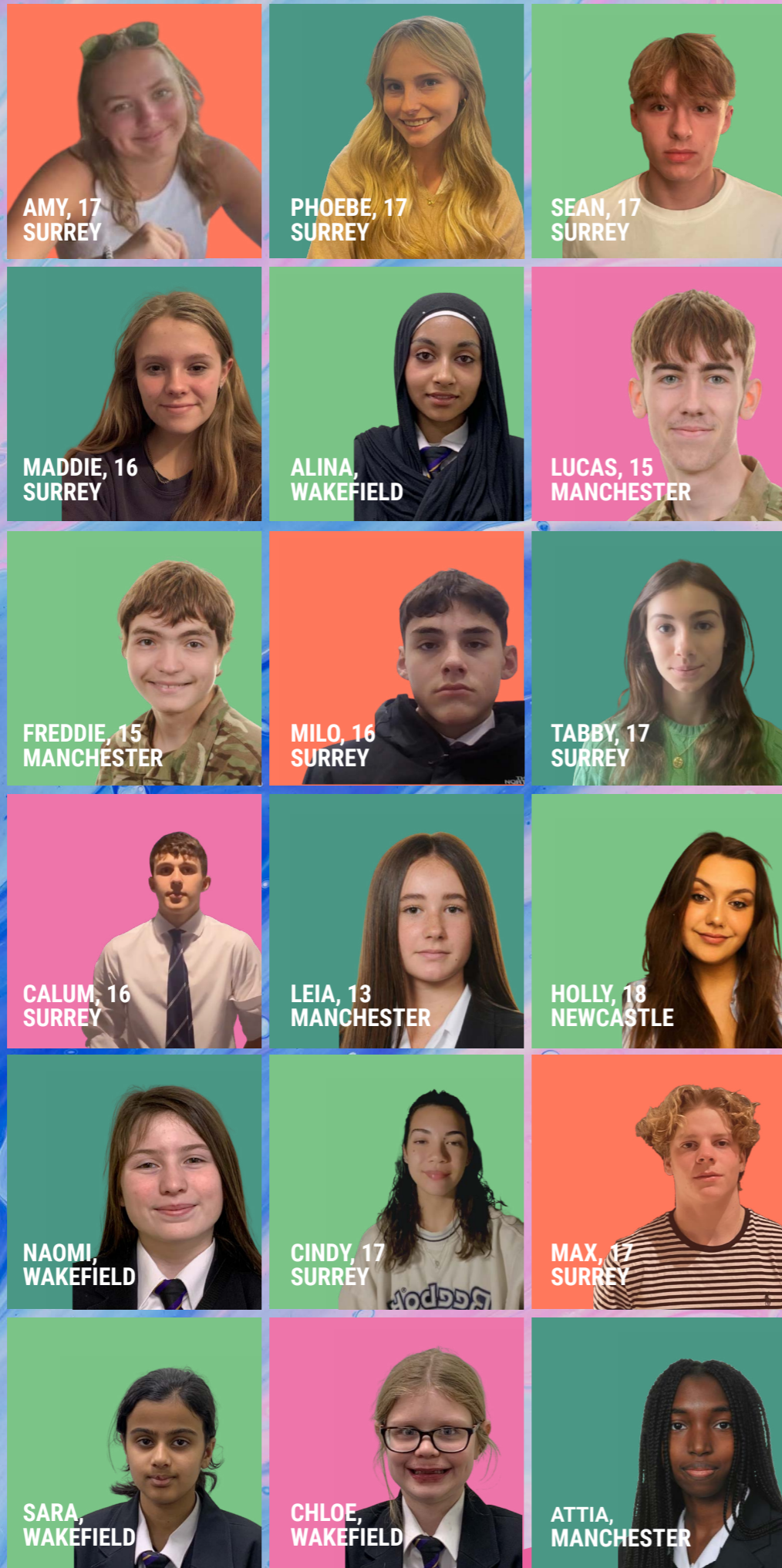


GREENWASHING & TRANSPARENCY: YOUTH-BUSINESS DIALOGUE

FFM BUSINESS MEMBERS DISCUSS
THE FUTURE OF THE FOOD
INDUSTRY WITH THE PEOPLE WHO
MATTER THE MOST.



YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD



INTRODUCTION

Acknowledging the significance of open dialogue and collaboration, a meeting was held to bridge the gap between businesses and the younger generation.

The meeting, a unique opportunity for exchanging perspectives between the business community and the Youth Advisory Board, focused on Greenwashing and Transparency, an area that has gained considerable attention and concern among both businesses and consumers recently.

the youth representatives in the first part, while giving the young individuals an opportunity to ask their burning questions directly to the businesses in the second part. This report provides an overview of the meeting, outlining key highlights and shedding light on the discussions that occurred during the Q&A sessions.

The meeting was structured into two sections, enabling business members to pose questions to



PAUL JAMES
HEAD OF SUSTAINABILITY,
DAIRYGOLD FOOD INGREDIENTS (DFI) UK LTD



Dairygold is a supplier of cheese and dairy ingredient solutions to the UK's leading food manufacturers and Food Service providers. DFI UK is a subsidiary of the Dairygold Co-Operative Society, one of Ireland's largest dairy co-operatives.

DAVID MOORE
GROUP HEAD OF ESG, THE COMPLEAT FOOD GROUP



The Compleat Food Group are a UK based food manufacturer supplying UK retailers with pastry, olives, antipasti, plant-based and charcuterie products across retailer own label and branded lines.



NINA FISCHER-YARGICI
MEMBERSHIP MANAGER, COOL FARM ALLIANCE

The Cool Farm Alliance is a not-for-profit community of agri-food companies, academics, consultancies, and NGOs, with a shared mission to accelerate the transition to regenerative and sustainable agriculture.



JULIETTE MILLE
ESG MANAGER AT PREMIER FOODS

Premier Foods is one of the UK's largest food producers and we make products which can be found in roughly 90% of UK households - from Ambrosia, Bisto, Oxo, Mr Kipling, Sharwoods, Lloyd Grossman, Batchelors or Angel Delights, you've probably tried one of their products.



MIA HARTWELL
RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS
AND ENGAGEMENT LEAD, SAMWORTH BROTHERS

Samworth Brothers is one of the UK's largest manufacturers premium quality chilled & ambient foods, employing over 10,000 people to create both branded and own label products.

BUSINESS MEMBERS ASKED:

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH GREENWASHING?

The Board discussed the importance of transparency in communication, stating that the term "Greenwashing" refers to the practice of misleading customers and investors by falsely claiming environmental responsibility or sustainability. Primarily, they believe that the risk of this practice is that it erodes trust in companies that promote themselves as ethical, thereby diminishing the positive impact of genuine eco-friendly initiatives.

Naomi expresses that when companies deceive customers with false claims, it is detrimental as it misleads individuals who genuinely want to support eco-friendly and sustainable options. They further discussed that a lack of transparency undermines the efforts of genuine companies, diverting attention and resources away from the ones making genuine sustainability efforts. People become sceptical and may stop seeking out truly responsible options, assuming that most labels are just empty marketing ploys.

“Greenwashing reduces the trust and removes the power and positive effect that that label can have. People then won't even bother looking at the labels, assuming that most companies just put the information there and are not actually completing those activities.

TABBY



“The main problem is it undermines real, legitimate efforts and diverts attention and resources away from companies that really try.

SEAN



GREENWASHING

WHEN DO YOU THINK SOMETHING IS GREENWASHING AND HOW WOULD YOU SPOT IT?

It was widely accepted that greenwashing occurs when companies or supermarkets promote ethical or environmental claims, but their products are actually harmful to the environment. Cindy gave an example of when Starbucks committed to stop using plastic straws but in doing so, increased the amount of plastic in their lids.

They explained that a lack of proof or evidence to support eco-friendly claims, such as the use of the word "organic" without sharing certifications, is a red flag. And other words like "recyclable," "green," or "environmentally friendly" used on packaging can be too vague. The Board thought that many companies were missing solid verification of their sustainability claims.

Alina commented that spotting greenwashing can be challenging, but that it is important to look beyond marketing claims by checking, for example, if packaging is genuinely recyclable and by verifying certifications like "organic" or "Fair Trade".

“Look beyond the packaging's colour or nature-themed images.

ALINA



“Words used on packaging, like "recyclable", "green" or "environmentally-friendly" are kind of broad. There are many companies that don't have solid verification that they are actually sustainable.

PHOEBE



WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION, OR PROOF, WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE FROM COMPANIES ABOUT HOW THEY ARE WORKING TOWARDS THEIR SUSTAINABILITY GOALS, AND WHAT IS THE BEST WAY FOR COMPANIES TO COMMUNICATE WITH OR ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE?



To demonstrate their sustainability efforts, the Board suggested various channels via which companies should provide information. Amy suggests demonstrating active efforts to make a difference on company websites and highlighting big changes on packaging to make it noticeable to consumers.

Sara suggested age-appropriate communication, including the use of pictures and animations, along with utilising platforms like YouTube and Snapchat for advertising. Naomi echoed the power of animations and incorporating animals to engage younger audiences.

Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok were also named as an effective way for reaching young customers, with both Chloe and Sean emphasising the importance of clear, honest and simple communication. However, Hollie raised the importance of conducting research on brands, particularly if they are seen on social media, rather than accepting messages and credentials at face value.

Leia suggests presenting clear, understandable goals and publicly reporting on progress as well as showing verification by a trustworthy third party. She cited the example of the Intertek Green Leaf Mark as an example of a way that a company might provide reassurance to consumers regarding their commitment to the environment. Although Max pointed out the need for companies to explain the 'why' and 'how' behind their sustainability initiatives, rather than solely relying on labelling.

What the discussion highlights, is the Board's high expectations and anticipation for witnessing sustainable practices in action, with a desire for more information and proof to support sustainability claims. They think that younger generations are more direct in giving feedback and would be happy to call out businesses if they felt the company was being inauthentic or lacking sufficient action.



" I think many companies just think about putting that they are sustainable on their products and that people believe that. I think we need a bit more information about 'why' and 'how' they are going to be green?

MAX

" Be relatable, transparent and speak honestly. Explain what you need to but be quite simple with words rather than using complicated terms.

SEAN



" Young customers are on social media all the time, it's a great way to show your company's actually doing something.

AMY



" For the younger generation an animation would be probably the best way forward because they tend to stick in people's heads especially if you add a bit of humour to it.

NAOMI

" I don't think there's that many people of my generation who are going online, searching a website before they buy from somewhere. But I think if marketing comes up on Instagram or TikTok, for example advertising on the 'For You Pages' on TikTok, that it would be seen – and once it is seen, subconsciously you will have that in the back of your mind when you're buying stuff from the supermarket.

TABBY



" Try using adverts on YouTube, you can't just skip them

SARA



" Set clear, understandable goals and report publicly on progress. Use trusted third parties to provide consumers with reassurance that they are buying from companies that are committed to help in the environment.

LEIA



WOULD SEEING INFORMATION ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF FOOD PRODUCTS ON MENUS INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION IN CHOOSING THOSE FOOD PRODUCTS OVER OTHERS?

The responses highlight various labels that may influence the decision to choose food products based on their environmental impacts.



Milo said he was influenced by organic and natural products, as well as supporting locally sourced foods and sustainable farming practices.

preferring easily recyclable and environmentally friendly packaging.

Attia discussed the significance of Fair Trade, but also said she'd be more inclined to buy from a company that could show carbon neutral certifications, which she said provides reassurance to consumers. She also acknowledged the cost difference between environmentally friendly and non-environmentally friendly options can deter some consumers.

Rather than overwhelming the consumer with lots of messages, which Cindy thinks looks cluttered, selecting one or two key messages is more effective in capturing consumers' attention and conveying the product's sustainability and environmental features.

Hollie mentioned that packaging is still the major driver on her purchasing decision,

Overall, the responses demonstrate the significance of organic and natural products, ethical certifications, sustainable farming practices, locally sourced foods, recyclable packaging, and clear messaging in influencing consumers' decisions regarding environmentally friendly food products.



WHICH ROLE IN A FOOD COMPANY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSPARENCY IN SUSTAINABILITY, COMMUNICATION, AND WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR PREVENTING GREENWASHING FROM HAPPENING?

The Board offered different perspectives on who they saw as responsible for maintaining transparency and preventing greenwashing within a food company.

Tabby voiced that both marketing and legal teams play a role in preventing greenwashing, marketing deciding how sustainability is portrayed, while the legal team can ensure compliance and help avoid misleading claims. She also said the responsibility lies with the individuals who provide both teams with the information.

of a government board to conduct yearly checks on companies and receive consumer feedback. Companies would receive scores rated satisfactory to unsatisfactory, similar to Ofsted ratings, and fines would be issued for unsustainable practices.

Chloe commented that everyone in a company shares the responsibility, with marketing being diligent in double-checking for greenwashing and the CEO having a significant role in overall accountability.

Overall, the responses demonstrate the shared responsibility within a company, involving marketing, legal teams, CEOs, and any individuals responsible for providing information. The need for external input, such as government regulation and engagement with customers and school students is also highlighted as important in ensuring transparency and preventing greenwashing.

Chloe also proposed that external parties should also hold responsibility, suggesting the creation

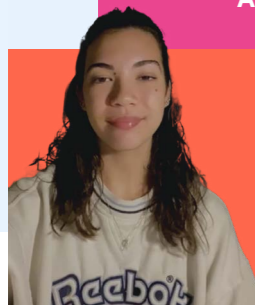
" In Morrisons bananas are priced equally at 99p, but the organic and Fair Trade ones are £1.28 – 30% higher. I think this makes a lot of people feel this disinclined to purchase products with these labels... because most people often go for the cheaper produce rather than the most expensive one.

ATTIA



" People are able to pay attention to one or two specific things when they can pinpoint exactly what the product is talking about. I think people prefer if something's pointed out neatly and in a more structured way.

CINDY



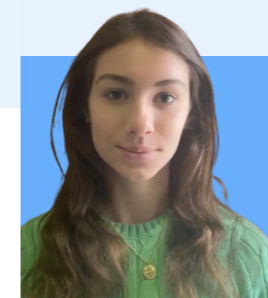
" Choose foods that have been grown with sustainable farming practices, make sure that they're not using up non-renewable resources, that cause damage that can't be fixed. With synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, whilst you might not be able to taste it, they're going to be worse for you and they're going to be worse for the environment.

MILO



" The people who are design packaging aren't actually the ones responsible for making the product sustainable – they are just told the information and decide how they wanted to portray it.

TABBY



" It's everyone's responsibility.

CHLOE



I THINK ONE OF THE WAYS COMPANIES CAN AVOID GREENWASHING IS TO HAVE CLEAR SCIENCE-BASED TARGETS. HOW DO YOU THINK COMPANIES CAN DEMONSTRATE THEIR COMMITMENT AND THEIR PROGRESS TO AVOID GREENWASHING?

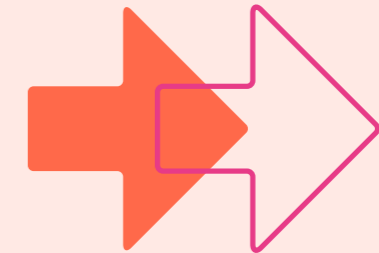
The responses to Leia's question highlight the significance of combining transparent, honest and ongoing reporting, with upskilling and education.

One Business Member responded that the nature of the Science-Based Targets Initiative means companies are expected to communicate their progress annually and report transparently. They also highlighted the need for companies to be open and honest, not just focusing on successes but also acknowledging and addressing challenges. This approach promotes authenticity and builds trust, as it shows a commitment to continuous improvement rather than portraying a perfect image.

Mia Hartwell, Samworth Brothers, added a different perspective by pointing out the importance of education within businesses. She suggested that everyone in the company should understand what claims can be made and what constitutes valid and substantiated information. By educating employees about the environment and the importance of making a genuine difference, companies can avoid unintentional greenwashing.



LEIA



“ I think one of the key things is being very open and honest. So not just talking about the successes, I think it's also actually talking about the challenges as well. I think it comes across a lot more authentic and a lot more real to say 'these are the areas that we've identified as challenges for us, and we're working to get through them' to me.

“ Often everyone's got really good intent – and they get very excited about the good things that are going on – but if you don't talk about it in quite the right way, that's when you can end up greenwashing. So, I think there's a big piece around everybody learning more about the environment, how we can make a difference and what is a really valuable, valid claim.

MIA

Samworth Brothers
QUALITY FOODS

WHAT DATA DO YOU THINK A COMPANY SHOULD USE TO BACK UP CLAIMS AND HOW DO WE AS YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW WE CAN TRUST THEM?

The responses stress the need for reliable verification systems, a clearer understanding of data- particularly in what is being compared with what- sharing baseline data and openly discussing both successes and challenges.

Nina, Cool Farm Alliance, pointed out the uniqueness of each supply chain with even neighbouring farms with similar soils and outputs, recording different results. She emphasised the importance of understanding what data is being compared and suggested that companies sharing their own baseline and comparing their progress from year to year can be a reliable indicator.

Paul James, Dairygold Food Ingredients, agreed with the need for transparency and trust in backing up claims and expected there to be an evolution in the sustainability space to help provide consumers with confidence in the claims made by companies, talking about the need for reliable verification systems that currently don't fully exist.

ALINA



MAX

WHAT MEASURES DO YOU THINK COMPANIES SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE TO BE A HUNDRED PERCENT CERTAIN THAT THEIR PRODUCTS ARE MADE AND SOURCED SUSTAINABLY AND ETHICALLY?

David Moore, The Compleat Food Group, acknowledged the complexity of the sustainability space and how even professionals struggle to fully grasp it. But collective agreement on data and interpretation of data are crucial in determining what claims can be made.

He highlights that there is already a lot of collaboration happening to simplify the information for consumers who want to make ethical and sustainable choices.



I think there's going to be an evolution in this space, where there are more verification systems available to businesses that will allow us to show our progress openly – like we do with food safety

PAUL

Every supply chain is different and even every farmer. It's important to understand what's being compared. Companies sharing their own baseline and comparing their own progress from year to year is a very reliable thing to look at.

NINA



It's not where it needs to be yet, but in the UK, there are forums and working groups led by retailers and retail bodies working on these issues. So, it is coming.

DAVID

Mia Hartwell, Samworth Brothers, discussed the importance of proactively verifying supplier practices and the challenge of achieving total confidence in sustainable and ethical production, particularly for food products with multiple suppliers in every value chain.

Probably the best way to check a product is produced 100% sustainably and ethically would be to make it entirely yourself, because you can make sure you're doing it to your standards – but when you are working in food, you've got a long line of suppliers and that's where it gets challenging.

MIA



There is a potential gap between the industry and the general public's understanding of sustainability. Businesses may be hesitant to discuss its complexity, fearing it may come across as making excuses. But it was suggested that this complexity should be acknowledged publicly, with businesses able to openly share both their successes and challenges, fostering a culture of transparency and mutual understanding.

In summary, the responses show the need for companies to verify supplier practices, collaborate with stakeholders, interpret data accurately, and communicate transparently about sustainable and ethical measures. The complexity of the issue is acknowledged, and ongoing efforts are being made to improve standards and mechanisms in this area.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU FOUND OUT SOMETHING YOU (OR A COMPANY YOU WORKED WITH) MARKETED A PRODUCT OR SERVICE AS SUSTAINABLE – AND IT TURNED OUT NOT TO BE?

NAOMI



I THINK YOU CAN TELL WHEN A COMPANY IS GENUINELY PASSIONATE ABOUT ITS PURPOSE. HOW DO YOU THINK A COMPANY COULD CHANGE THEIR COMPANY VALUES AND PRACTICES TO BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE?

AMY



The discussion touched upon the challenges of keeping up with evolving data and scientific understanding and acknowledged the complexity and lack of clear regulations and guidance in the sustainability field. The panel expressed the need for continuous learning, transparency, and efforts to simplify information and educate both businesses and the general public about sustainability.

A Business Member considered a few key areas in this question. Firstly, recognising that things can change, and what may initially seem sustainable can later be proven otherwise, particularly as new information and evidence emerge. If wrongdoing or deception is uncovered, it should be addressed promptly and if something is discovered to be unsustainable, it should be removed from the market and replaced with a better alternative.

They also spoke about ingredients like soy, particularly in plant-based products, that require careful scrutiny to ensure they meet sustainability criteria such as being non-GM (genetically modified) or organically certified. This involves verifying certifications and assessing the entire supply chain.

Juliette Mille, Premier Foods, says that a crucial first step is to understand the expectations and concerns of stakeholders such as consumers, investors, and colleagues. Setting clear goals and objectives is important in establishing transparent and well-understood targets and helps create a common set of goals to work towards. As sustainability initiatives may face competing priorities, such as commercial targets, supply chain issues, and conflicting interests, it is necessary to align values and beliefs within the whole organisation. Additionally, it is important to address confusion and challenges surrounding sustainability terminology and ensure clarity in communication.

Paul James, Dairygold Food Ingredients, stressed the significance of support and passion from leadership in embedding sustainability. But he also discussed the importance of upskilling and improving climate literacy across the entire organisation. Climate literacy involves educating employees about sustainability concepts, keeping up with the constant changes in the field, and helping to ensure that everyone understands the company's strategy and can actively contribute to achieving sustainability goals.



We're very lucky that the Head of our UK business is really passionate about sustainability, so we have no problem with buy-in from the top.

PAUL



I don't think anybody's deliberately being misleading. Sometimes people think they're doing things with the right intent and trying to help people by talking about how green a product is, but the reality may be that when you dig into it, it isn't what you think it is and the science or the evidence isn't there. We're all learning as we go.

Another Business Member agreed that the first step is to withdraw the product from the market and to communicate transparently about the issue. They emphasised the need for a thorough investigation to identify the root causes and understand what went wrong. Adding, that in most cases, mistakes are not intentional deception but can arise from differences in standards, evolving science, or verification processes – highlighting the importance of implementing processes to prevent similar mistakes in the future.



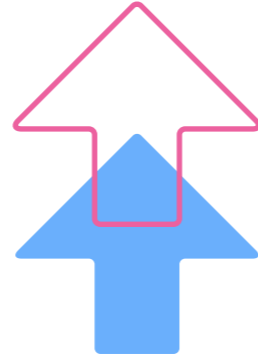
There's been a lot of cases in recent years of companies being accused of greenwashing where they have actually been doing something that has actually been independently verified and then investigative journalism, for example, has uncovered that actually that verification process wasn't as robust as the company was led to believe.



I think it's about setting clear goals and objectives. It's about understanding 'why are we doing it' and really 'why do we truly believe in it as a business?' I think once you've got that clear and you've got colleagues engaged, it's about continuing to push for it to change constantly.

JULIETTE

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FOOD BUSINESSES?



BACK IT UP

Although there is still a way to go on reliable data and verification systems, ongoing reporting is vital for transparency as there is a growing need for more information and proof to support sustainability claims, not only within your own organisation but within your entire supply chain. Companies may need to conduct independent audits of suppliers to verify claims remain true.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND LEARNINGS

Companies need to be adaptable, learn from their mistakes and openly share their findings. Continuous improvement is essential for driving sustainability agendas, with the Board recognising a shared responsibility within a company, involving various stakeholders, teams and individuals, to ensure transparency. Climate education within companies is crucial to supporting your entire workforce to deliver on your commitments and demonstrate progress.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The Youth Advisory Board voiced the importance of collecting feedback from and communicating clearly to younger generations. In addition to factors that may influence young people's decisions towards purchasing environmentally friendly food products, such as organic and natural products, FairTrade certifications, sustainable farming practices, locally sourced foods, recyclable packaging, and clear messaging, the Youth Advisory Board recommended:

- Using channels such as Snapchat and TikTok or Youtube
- Focusing on animated content or videos





THE FUTURE FOOD MOVEMENT

youTh 
ADVISORY BOARD
AMPLIFYING YOUNG VOICES