Wal-Mart thinking globally, acting locally

Giant retailers announce initiative to focus on locally grown produce

By Bruce Kirby

BUSINESS WRITER

Wal-Mart has announced a program that will focus on sustainability and agriculture among its suppliers, as it aims to expand its global reach by connecting consumers and local farmers through environmental efficiency among its suppliers.

The program, called “green for growth,” will be the largest of its kind and will be rolled out in partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council, with the goal of growing all produce locally by the end of 2019, and, when local produce isn’t available, to increase the percentage of local produce to 10 percent.

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, Wal-Mart has pledged $10 billion of food and produce to 1,000 small farmers and ranchers (which it defines as farmers with less than 20 hectares, or about 50 acres). It will also provide training for the farmers and their families on how to choose crops that are in demand and to the proper application of water and fertilizers.

Both in the United States and globally, Wal-Mart will invest more than $10 million in improved production plans for its green-for-growth program. For example, it plans to invest in improved transportation systems that can help small farmers deliver to Wal-Mart more quickly and effectively. The company also plans to invest in research and development to help farmers reduce food waste and to stop asking questions about why they are not selling their produce.

The eventual goal is to include that information on sustainability by customers, so they can make informed choices about their food.

While the overall goal includes such measures, it is not yet clear how much of the food waste will be reduced or eliminated. Wal-Mart is aiming for a 10 percent decrease in food waste by the end of 2019.

“Wal-Mart is committed to improving the food system and reducing waste, and we are excited to announce a new program that will help us achieve our goals,” said John W. Durso, vice president for strategy and corporate development.

The program is expected to meet the goals by the end of 2018, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Wal-Mart said it is expected to reach the goal by the end of 2018 in the United States, with plans to double the percentage of locally grown produce by 2020.

Wal-Mart defines local as produce grown within 150 miles of the store. The program will be rolled out in partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council, with the goal of growing all produce locally by the end of 2019, and, when local produce isn’t available, to increase the percentage of local produce to 10 percent.

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