Wal-Mart thinking globally, acting locally

Giant retailer announces initiative to focus on locally grown produce

By Bruce Kirby

Wal-Mart Stores announced a program on Thursday that would focus on sustainable agriculture among its suppliers, as it seeks to expand its efforts to improve environmental efficiency among its suppliers.

The program is intended to put more locally grown food in Wal-Mart's stores in the United States, invest in training and infrastructure for small and medium-size farmers, particularly in emerging markets, and begin to measure the efficiency of large suppliers in growing and getting their produce to market.

Given that Wal-Mart is the world's largest grocer, one of the biggest supply chains, any changes that it makes would have widespread implications. Wal-Mart's decision for years ago to set sustainability goals that, among other things, increased its reliance on renewable energy and reduced packaging waste among its suppliers, sent broad ripples through product manufacturers. Large companies like Procter & Gamble rode signed packages that are carried by other retailers, while Wal-Mart's measurements of environmental efficiency among its suppliers helped define how they needed to change.

"No other retailer has the ability to make such a difference as Wal-Mart," the retailer's president and chief executive, Michael T. Duke, said in remarks prepared for a meeting Thursday morning. "Grocery is more than half of Wal-Mart's business. Yet only four of our 39 public sustainability goals address food."

Wal-Mart said it is expected to meet the goals by the end of 2018.

In the United States, Wal-Mart plans to double the percentage of locally grown produce, to 20 percent. Wal-Mart defines local food as that grown and sold in the same state. Still, the program is far less ambitious than in some other countries — in Canada, for instance. Wal-Mart expects to buy 20 percent of produce locally by the end of 2019, and, when local produce is available, increase that to 100 percent.

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Poised documentary photographer dies at 94

By Philip Gefter

Robert Frank, one of the most influential photographers of the 20th century, whose usually raw and personally expressive style was pivotal in changing the course of documentary photography, died on Monday in Inverness, Nova Scotia. He was 94.

He died at a breakfast. Inverness Consolidated Memorial Hospital in Cape Breton Island, was confirmed by Mr. MacGill, whose Pace-MacGill Gallery in Manhattan has represented Mr. Frank's work since 1961. Mr. Frank, a Manhattan resident, had long had a summer home in Mabou, Nova Scotia. He was 94.

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