

Upstate Niagara Cooperative Responds to Customer Sustainability Requests



Upstate Niagara Cooperative, Inc.

Upstate Niagara Cooperative, Inc. (UNC), one of the nation's top dairy cooperatives owned by farmers, has made high-quality dairy products since 1971. UNC offers a wide variety of products including milk, dip, ice cream mix, yogurt, cheese, and flavored milk-based beverages. In addition to custom co-packing these products for retail and food service customers, UNC also markets their own line of products under the Upstate Farms, Bison, Intense brands.

Challenge

With increasing requests from global customers to report sustainability and environmental efforts, UNC recognized the opportunity to maintain and gain competitive positioning by being a differentiated supplier, especially to larger companies that commonly seek out and qualify vendors by their sustainability-related commitments. To achieve this, UNC needed to establish an Environmental Management System (EMS), track and report the company's carbon emissions, and set goals for reducing energy consumption, water use and waste generation. Responding to customer sustainability requests will allow UNC to maintain its commitment towards continuous improvement through more effective measurement and monitoring techniques, ultimately resulting in opportunities to reduce environmental impacts as well as costs.

Solution

UNC requested assistance from the New York State Pollution Prevention Institute (NYSP2I) to conduct a review of manufacturing operations in an effort to determine the sustainability status of the company. NYSP2I focused on reviewing documentation and information provided by UNC, completing assessments at five manufacturing facilities and engaging with top management, identifying necessary elements for an EMS, and conducting benchmarking. The work performed provided guidance for meeting specific environmental goals required by global customers, including establishing elements of an EMS and reducing environmental impacts related to energy/greenhouse gas emissions, water use, and waste generation.

Challenge

- With increasing requests from global customers to report sustainability and environmental efforts, UNC recognized the opportunity to maintain and gain competitive positioning by being a differentiated supplier through their sustainability commitments

Solution

- NYSP2I reviewed documentation and information provided by UNC, completed assessments, engaged with top management, identified elements for an EMS, and conducted benchmarking

Results

- NYSP2I identified gaps and opportunities to be considered that enable UNC to enhance their sustainability commitments
- UNC is well positioned to respond to requests from existing customers, and to attract additional customers, particularly those with a commitment to sustainability
- The engagement of employees during the project has increased enthusiasm across the corporation and will help ensure its success

Results

As a result of the work performed by NYSP2I, documentation was developed including process flow diagrams showing environmental aspects, input-output diagrams for environmental impacts, an environmental risk analysis for significance determination, a data analysis for establishing objectives and targets, an ISO 14001:2015 EMS readiness gap assessment, a carbon footprint calculation tool, and a draft supplier code of conduct with scorecard. Through this work, NYSP2I identified gaps and opportunities to be considered that enable UNC to enhance their sustainability commitments.

Using the tools and guidelines mentioned above, UNC is well positioned to respond to requests from existing customers, and to attract additional customers, particularly those with a commitment to sustainability. Furthermore, the engagement of employees during the project has increased enthusiasm across the corporation and will help ensure its success.

“Partnering with NYSP2I provided a great boost to our Sustainability program here at Upstate Niagara. The team was a pleasure to work with throughout the project, the knowledge and resources they provided to our team has been invaluable in building out our Environmental Management System.”

Anthony Quagliana
Continuous Improvement and
Sustainability Manager
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Funding provided by the Environmental Protection Fund as administered by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. ©2019 Rochester Institute of Technology. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed are those of Rochester Institute of Technology and its NYS Pollution Prevention Institute and do not necessarily reflect the views of New York State.