

The FMCG industry's journey to reducing carbon footprint

Businesses now need to show sustainability via action; the days of just having good intentions are long gone. This is an unavoidable reality for the FMCG sector, from industry policies to minimising environmental effect and maintaining relevance in a market heavily influenced by consumer behavior and uncontrollable economic developments.



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The question however this World Earth Day is what sustainable practices should the sector be prioritising to reduce their carbon footprint?

“When approached strategically, sustainability can become far more than a compliance exercise. It can strengthen customer trust, deepen brand loyalty and position businesses as leaders in a highly competitive marketplace,” says Morne Botes, commercial director at Southern Oil (SOILL).

“Our view on sustainability has always been intentional not only in terms of operational efficiencies but also so we can look back at the responsible choices we have made that have built and fed communities while leaving the environment better than how we found it.”

Today FMCG brands are navigating a complex ecosystem where affordability, performance and sustainability must coexist. While cost pressures remain a reality for both businesses and households, consumer sentiment is sending a clear message: sustainability matters.

Research shows that 80% of consumers are willing to pay more for sustainably produced goods, highlighting a powerful opportunity for brands that are prepared to act decisively.

In fact, governance is what guides industry movements, it holds power over the sector's actions and how committed they are to serving communities, consumers and the environment. And key sustainable industry practices should be prioritised as foundational plays to reduce carbon footprints.

Environmentally aligned packaging

Beyond product design and functionality, product packaging that considers the environment speaks to future proofing and caring beyond the cost returns from sales.

It's about understanding that living off the environment has far reaching and longer lasting impacts and so repurposing, reusing and reducing is key.

Packaging as an example should form part of and FMCG's sustainable solution – allowing the brand to not only recover as much packaging as they introduce to the market but very importantly transition to a circular and low-carbon packaging systems.

Recyclability and circular economy

In a country where the total domestic waste generated by households is estimated at 12.7 million tonnes per annum, with each person generating around 2kgs of waste per day, it is clear that the FMCG sector needs work hard in finding solutions that alleviate the environmental pressures from waste generated.

In fact, producers, should take responsibility for their products and packaging throughout their lifecycle, including post-consumer use, which supports circular-economy thinking.

Botes echoes the sentiment; “As producers, we are constantly assessing our sustainability journey, making informed decisions to ensure our packaging is intentional, using efficient materials that are recyclable to meet industry standards. Understanding industry role and how it affects or contributes towards environmental shifts, means industry players recognise that everyone must take accountability. We have also realised that taking small steps towards sustainability, over a period of time, can have a huge impact on your carbon footprint.”

Economic sustainability

Small steps extend beyond packaging however and this is where the value chain comes in. From supply chain to local and responsible sourcing – ethical business practices come into play.

Are businesses sourcing high quality materials? Are they boosting local suppliers and trade?

All of these often play a role as to why consumers endorse a brand or look at repeat purchases.

“As a business that relies on local agriculture, we source directly from South African farmers. This not only builds local but also boosts supply chain by cutting transport emissions linked to long-distance logistics. It is a practical response that aligns well with the G20's call for resilient, locally anchored food systems,” adds Botes.

“Sustainability is a journey that requires more action than intention to create a value chain from packaging, waste management, economic inclusion and sourcing material. For businesses in the FMCG sector, it's about how you use sustainability for business growth and environmental enrichment with a lens of

accessibility, affordability and responsibility to inform business decisions,” concludes Botes.

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