

# More than 90% of food and agriculture companies don't do enough to farm sustainably or provide healthy food

*Research finds more than 90% of food and agriculture companies don't do enough to farm sustainably or provide healthy food*

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The food and agriculture sector must urgently put people at the centre of this transition, starting with the farmers their business depends on and the consumers they serve."

*Viktoria de Bourbon de Parme*

Alliance assessed 350 of the world's major food and agriculture companies, showing a concerning lack of commitment to protect people and planet.

□ These companies source many of their food commodities from small-scale farmers who are not paid enough: fewer than 4% of companies assess how to bridge these living income gaps.

□ To reach net zero, we must stop commodity driven deforestation by 2025, but just 6% of assessed companies

have a time-bound commitment to eliminate deforestation.

The World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) has published new research showing that the vast majority of the world's major food and agriculture companies need to take decisive action to protect the planet and to feed the world in a healthy and equitable way.

WBA analysed the 350 most influential food and agriculture companies around the world, including Bayer, Unilever and Walmart, to ensure the industry is held accountable for its role in contributing to healthier, more sustainable and more equitable food systems. The companies were ranked on how they are managing their impact on nature and the environment, improving the healthiness of their food products, and providing decent working conditions.

Food systems rely on nature but companies are failing to protect it and mitigate climate impact.

While food systems are responsible for a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, and agricultural expansion drives almost 90% of global deforestation, only 15% of companies have a commitment to zero ecosystem conversion, and just 6% have a time-bound commitment to

eliminate deforestation entirely. Worryingly, only 2% of companies understand their wider impact on nature, despite their reliance on the long-term health of the planet to grow crops.

There has been some small progress across the sector since 2021: almost 50% of companies have some form of climate commitments, of which 46 companies have scope one and two GHG reduction targets in line with limiting global warming to 1.5C and report progress, up from 27 in 2021, and 13 report progress against science based targets for scope three emissions, up from 7 in 2021.

Jenni Black, WBA's Nature Transformation Lead, said:

"To reach net zero by 2050, we know we must end deforestation by 2025. Food and agriculture companies have a huge opportunity to simultaneously tackle climate change and biodiversity loss by eliminating deforestation. But despite some leading companies committing to end deforestation, our benchmark results show there is still a long way to go."

Food systems don't meet the needs of consumers, farmers or local communities.

Humanity depends on food for survival, yet a third of the global population suffers from malnutrition. Food companies have an urgent responsibility to prevent food insecurity, micronutrient deficiencies and diet related diseases.

Currently, only 49 (18%) consumer-facing companies share how they are adapting products to improve their nutritional quality, and just five companies have set targets to increase sales from healthy foods, with retailers leading the way. Those furthest behind are global restaurant chains and food service providers, who are failing to show decisive steps to improve their food offerings.

The 350 companies assessed source food commodities, such as coffee, cocoa and palm oil, from around 75 million small-scale producers based in 40 low-and middle-income countries. Most of these countries are impacted by persistent poverty. Encouragingly, 94 (27%) of companies support farmers' income stability through procurement and pricing practices, but only 13 (4%) identify living income benchmarks or calculate living income gaps.

Indigenous people represent 6% of the global population and take care of 20% of land on earth which is the habitat for 80% of the world's biodiversity. However, only 5 (1%) companies demonstrate that they seek free, prior and informed consent from the communities on whether or how to conduct projects in Indigenous territories.

Viktoria de Bourbon de Parme, WBA's Food and Agriculture Transformation Lead, said:

"Companies are improving farmer livelihoods but not at a level that lifts them out of poverty. The food and agriculture sector must urgently put people at the centre of this transition, starting with the farmers their business depends on and the consumers they serve. Disappointingly, our data shows that farmers are not rewarded fairly, and that nutritious products come at a

premium."

Companies are starting to consider regenerative practices but aren't doing enough to reduce water use and soil pollution.

With almost 50% of agricultural lands moderately to severely degraded, regenerative agriculture practices are hailed as an important lever to restore soil health, increase climate resilience, protect water resources and biodiversity, and enhance farmers' productivity and profitability. Regenerative agriculture has gained traction with 51% of companies referencing it and 27% implementing strategies to improve livelihoods of farmers and fishers through procurement practices and pricing strategies.

While companies are ambitious about regenerative agriculture, little is being done to reduce chemical inputs and water pollution, preventing real regeneration of soil and water. As agriculture is responsible for 70% of the world's freshwater use, the sector has a decisive role to play.

Companies are increasingly conscious of their water use, with approx a third reporting reduction in usage, but only 12% of companies are reporting the level of pollutants they are putting into water sources, and just 2% have set committed targets to reduce water pollution.

Only 31 companies (9%) have set targets to optimise the use of fertilisers, and 14 companies (4%) have targets to minimise the use of pesticides. Protecting soil and water, for people and the planet, requires clearer outcomes-based strategies that consider the role of agriculture on the ecosystem and on society.

WBA is calling for rapid action from food and agriculture companies as improving the performance of the food and agriculture sector could have a vast ripple effect, including protecting and restoring nature, contributing to people's health and wellbeing, and lifting people out of poverty.

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About the Food and Agriculture Benchmark

Please see the full Food and Agriculture Benchmark available here:

<https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/publication/food-agriculture/>

About the Nature Benchmark

Please see the full Nature Benchmark available here:

<https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/publication/nature/>

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