



This month, *The Shelby Report of the Midwest* salutes our first Sustainability in the Food Industry honorees. These companies have demonstrated a commitment to reducing food waste, supporting hunger-relief efforts and improving operational efficiency. From eco-designed packaging to sustainable refrigeration solutions, they are doing all they can to build a smarter, greener and more resilient food ecosystem.

Balls Food Stores

Kansas City, Kansas

For more than three decades, Balls Food Stores has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to reducing food waste and fighting hunger through its longstanding partnership with Harvesters – The Community Food Network. Financial records dating back to 1992 show a consistent history of collaboration, though the partnership began even earlier, with additional donation records held in storage.

BFS supports Harvesters through two key programs. The first is the Food Barrel Program, in which barrels are placed in all stores for guest donations. To make giving even easier, BFS pioneered the idea of a pre-filled grocery sack available for purchase at \$10. This innovative approach has since been adopted by Harvesters with other retailers, multiplying its impact across the region.

The second initiative is the Grocery Store Recovery Program, where surplus food from the BFS central warehouse is donated to Harvesters, ensuring that products unsuitable for store shelves are redirected to families in need rather than wasted.



This enduring partnership has yielded profound results. According to Harvesters, since 1992 BFS has donated more than 3.7 million meals, with the true total even greater. In recognition of this legacy, Harvesters recently honored BFS as a founding member of its Million Meals Club through the Hunger Action Partner Program, celebrating organizations that have donated at least one million meals. On Sept. 18, Harvesters hosted a reception to celebrate BFS's achievement and long-term leadership in the fight against hunger.

Beyond its work with Harvesters, BFS also supports other community food initiatives. In 2024, BFS contributed nearly 500,000 meals to the Church of the Resurrection's food pantry, further extending its mission of nourishing communities.

Through innovation, influence and decades of dedication, Balls Food Stores has transformed food recovery into a powerful tool for sustainability and community care, standing as a model of how retailers can make a measurable difference in reducing waste and fighting hunger.



Cascades Plastics

Warrenton, Missouri

Cascades is a leading force in sustainable packaging, offering innovative, eco-designed solutions driven by strong expertise, a reliable supply chain and a commitment to a circular economy.

Cascades’ sustainability action plan (2020-25) highlights that it will have 100 percent of its packaging solutions be recyclable, compostable or reusable to support circularity and responsible end-of-life by 2030. As a result, Cascades’ team is always working to create alternatives to hard-to-recycle packaging products.

For instance, Cascades introduced the first recyclable tray with rolled edge technology made from 100 percent recycled PET and is prequalified as widely recyclable by How2Recycle in select communities in the United States. This innovation, in addition to offering the performance expected of a PET tray, is offered in multiple sizes, different grades and in a clear finish.

The environmental benefits of this tray have been demonstrated through its successful integration by Canada’s leading grocery retailer. Since making the transition from all EPS protein packaging for its private label to 100 percent rPET trays, this leader has implemented more than 150,000,000 trays made from 100 percent recycled PET.

Compared to virgin PET trays, this shift has led to an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, which is equivalent to 15,983 cars driving the 5,554-kilo-meter distance between New York and Los Angeles and to a 90 percent reduction in



non-renewable resources extraction (Life Cycle Assessments of Cascades trays, Groupe AGECO, Montreal, Eco-calculator version July 2024).

Similarly, compared to virgin EPS trays, this shift reduces the quantity of greenhouse gas emissions by 46 percent, which is equivalent to 3,288 cars driving that same distance and decreases the extraction of non-renewable resources by 73 percent.

Additionally, consumer surveys have shown that 66 percent of users are likely to recycle a rigid PET plastic tray, while just 38 percent would do so with a foam tray, and 63 percent of consumers consider the phrase “made from 100 percent recycled content” gives a better impression of eco-designed packaging (Cascades Web Survey, 807 North American respondents, April 14-27, 2025).

This highlights how Cascades’ innovation is aligned with the sustainability goals of the company, its customers and end-users. The positive environmental impact of these trays is significant, and this case demonstrates Cascades’ sustainable initiatives through low-impact packaging.

Empower Fresh Co.

Kansas City, Kansas

Empower Fresh is transforming sustainability and operational efficiency across the independent grocery landscape.

Its SaaS platform enables independent grocers – which often lack access to enterprise-grade technology – to optimize their produce operations with AI-driven tools that reduce shrink, increase sales velocity and minimize labor waste.

At the heart of the solution is a predictive ordering engine that ingests three years of sales and purchase data, combined with daily updates, to generate real-time, store-specific order recommendations. It is the only Native-AI Solution provider that is built by and enhanced daily by produce and retail industry professionals.

This precision drastically reduces over-ordering and spoilage – two of the largest contributors to food waste in retail. By accurately predicting demand and helping users right-size their inventory, it has helped grocers reduce produce shrink by up to 30 percent, which directly correlates to a substantial drop in the volume of unsold food that ends up in landfills. Less waste also means fewer transportation emissions and lower refrigeration costs – contributing meaningfully to a grocer’s carbon footprint reduction.

Empower Fresh’s platform also increases product turns and gross profit by enabling smarter ad planning. Grocers can simulate promotions using past sales lift, blended



gross margin and ROI data – ensuring promotional strategies that are economically and environmentally sound. This means more efficient sourcing and fewer unnecessary bulk orders that might otherwise go to waste.

Additionally, Empower Fresh empowers grocers to operate with leaner staffing models by simplifying inventory assessments and order processes. What used to take hours now takes minutes – saving hundreds of labor hours annually per store. The user-friendly interface also encourages best practices in merchandising and cooler management, enhancing the quality and shelf life of fresh produce.

Empower Fresh is not just a technology provider – it is a partner in building a smarter, greener and more resilient food ecosystem for the communities its customers serve.



The first bandsaw with a zero-accident track record



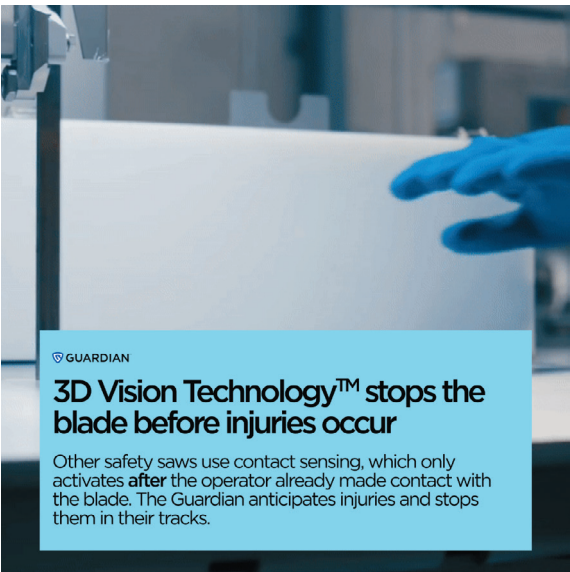
Guardian Bandsaw

LaVista, Nebraska

After delivering safety bandsaws to meat packing plants all over the world, Guardian noticed that retailers were still having a lot of serious injuries, including amputations. In response, the company developed the Guardian Lite, a saw specifically designed for retail applications. Now in a range of regional and national retail chains, butchers in these stores get to go home safe every day.

Guardian does more than just sell equipment; it builds lasting partnerships with customers. It provides hands-on training programs that teach workers how to operate the bandsaws safely and efficiently.

This complete approach means workers feel valued and supported, which makes them want to stay with their companies longer. When grocery stores keep experienced butchers, they save thousands of dollars on hiring and training costs while building stronger, more skilled meat departments.



3D Vision Technology™ stops the blade before injuries occur

Other safety saws use contact sensing, which only activates **after** the operator already made contact with the blade. The Guardian anticipates injuries and stops them in their tracks.



Sustainability Starts with Smarter Water Use

Dole has 52 water recirculation systems, operating in 83% of banana packing plants.

Leading banana production with innovative water management.

That's The Dole Way.



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Hussmann Corp.

St. Louis, Missouri

In 2024, Hussmann launched Evolve Technologies to create more sustainable refrigeration solutions that use environmentally friendly refrigerants, including R-744 (CO2) and R-290 (propane).

Hussmann is one of the world’s leading manufacturers of refrigerated merchandisers and refrigeration systems – producing, installing and servicing refrigeration solutions that display and preserve fresh foods in more than 250,000 supermarkets and convenience stores in the United States.

Evolve Technologies leverage low GWP refrigerants that are regulatory compliant and essential for the future of refrigeration. Globally, refrigeration and air conditioning contribute to about 10 percent of CO2 emissions. The company supports the U.S. EPA GreenChill Partnership in its efforts to recognize food retailers that reduce refrigerant emissions and decrease their impact on the ozone layer and climate change.

Hussmann even expanded its production capacity for transcritical CO2 refrigeration systems in its Suwanee, Georgia, facility and increased capacity for its self-contained R-290 (propane) line of products.

As part of its Evolve Technologies portfolio, Hussmann also launched countless new refrigeration systems and merchandisers, including the award-winning Monoblock, an outdoor condensing unit, Protocol CO2 Rack and AIM Act compliant merchandisers.

In addition, Hussmann created the Evolve Experience – a mobile roadshow to further expand the education and reach of its sustainable vision. The experience visited customers and retailers to provide stewardship and training on low GWP solutions for the food retailing industry.

The Evolve Experience is a hybrid classroom featuring the latest CO2 and R-290 solutions with equipment for hands-on learning, including outdoor condensing units,



controllers and leak detection technology. Hussmann teaches techs how to work on these new, sustainable refrigerants.

The impact of the Evolve Experience includes 10,245 miles traveled, 19 cities visited, 563 attendees and 24 retailers.

The Kroger Co.

Cincinnati, Ohio

Kroger is dedicated to its Purpose: To Feed the Human Spirit. The Kroger Family of Companies includes nearly half a million associates who serve more than 11 million customers daily through food inspiration and uplift and creating Zero Hunger | Zero Waste communities.

The Zero Hunger | Zero Waste plan, introduced in 2017, addresses a fundamental absurdity in the food system: Collectively, the country produces more than enough food to feed everyone, yet one in eight Americans still struggle with hunger. Kroger focuses on advancing change through its core business and operating model, strategic charitable giving and coalitions of action with communities to improve food and nutrition security, now and in the future.

Kroger aligns the majority of its charitable giving to national, regional and local organizations and programs that feed people. Since 2017, it has directed more than 3.4 billion meals to communities. This includes work with local food banks and pantries to support innovative food delivery models, including mobile or stationary food pantries that increase access to fresh food.

Several years ago, Kroger began aligning more of its total charitable giving to the Zero Hunger | Zero Waste impact plan. This includes cash donations and gift cards, foundation



grants, surplus fresh food donations through the Zero Hunger | Zero Waste Food Rescue program and other food and product donations.

At the local level, Kroger’s charitable dollars help Feeding America-affiliated food banks and other nonprofits build capacity to pick up more surplus fresh food from its stores, test and implement new food recovery and delivery models and feed more people. Since 2017, Kroger has directed \$1.5 billion in charitable giving to end hunger.

Every Kroger-operated store is linked to a local hunger-relief agency with the capacity to safely pick up and redistribute surplus fresh food. Kroger works closely with the Feeding America network of food banks and other hunger-relief partners to continually improve its food rescue program, expand the number of items eligible for donation and recover more fresh, nutritious food.

Nature Fresh Farms

Leamington, Ontario, Canada

Nature Fresh Farms is committed to creating meaningful sustainability impacts by focusing on reducing waste, finding innovative solutions and supporting communities. One of its largest initiatives is the use of an edible waste biodigester, which has digested more than 2,300 metric tons of food waste, transforming it into energy and fertilizer.



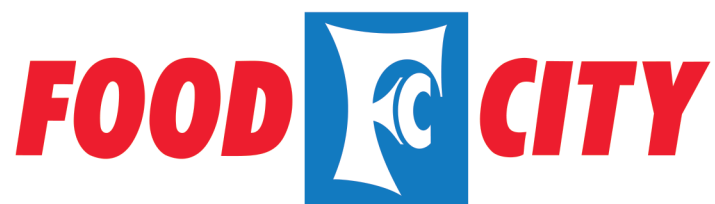
In addition, Nature Fresh Farms is piloting new farm-level waste solutions to ensure that the food it grows continues to serve a purpose beyond its greenhouses when it does not meet the quality standards for packaging.

While farm-level waste has traditionally gone to landfill, Nature Fresh Farms is working with an organization that repurposes produce into new products such as tomato paste for soup kitchens – helping address both food waste and food insecurity. It also ensures that inedible waste is redirected to local farmers, where it can be used as feed, keeping valuable nutrients within the agricultural system rather than being lost to landfill.



Congratulations to Food City!

Food City has been honored with the Shelby Report Sustainability Award for their commitment to greener practices—from investing over \$5 million annually in locally grown produce to sourcing sustainable seafood and grass-fed beef. With a hybrid fleet, EV chargers, energy-efficient systems, and community initiatives like Earth Day events, they are reducing their environmental impact while supporting local farmers and families.



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In 2024 alone, at Nature Fresh Farm’s Ohio facility, the company successfully diverted 227 metric tons of food waste from landfill to alternative uses. This measurable impact demonstrates its dedication to closing the loop on waste, supporting local communities and leading with innovative approaches that reduce environmental impact while feeding more people.



**NATURAL GROCERS®**



Sustainability Award
in the food industry



THANK YOU!

We are proud to receive this year's Sustainability Award!

Super One Foods Hermantown, Minnesota

Super One Foods is committed to sustainability. All store locations across the company have taken meaningful steps to reduce environmental impact while serving local communities.

The company’s sustainability efforts have included:

- **Energy efficiency:** Super One is proud to invest in voluntary energy-saving initiatives across all stores. Over the years, it has made significant upgrades, such as installing LED lighting and implementing smart refrigeration systems. The company’s latest investment includes the rollout of air curtain technology, designed to reduce energy use during overnight hours, saving an estimated 60,000 kWh per store each year.
- **Recycling and waste reduction:** In 2024, nearly 5 million plastic bags were recycled through the Bag2Bag program at Super One stores. Customers can drop off used plastic bags in designated in-store bins, where they are collected and repurposed into composite decking and other useful materials. In addition to bag recycling, Super One also recovers and recycles the shrink wrap used on pallets and incoming shipments, totaling more than 211,780 pounds annually. Each year, more than 9.7 million pounds of cardboard are also recycled, the equivalent of filling 122 semi-trailers. Together, these recycling efforts significantly reduce landfill waste and support more sustainable store operations.
- **Food rescue:** Super One Foods partners with local nonprofits to ensure surplus food helps feed communities, not landfills. Company-wide, all stores participate in food rescue programs, donating to organizations like Second Harvest Northland and other nonprofits that have community food shelves. Through the partnership with Second Harvest Northland, more than 596,000 pounds of food are rescued each year, enough to provide more than 475,000 meals for those in need.
- **Looking ahead:** Super One plans to expand energy-saving air curtain installations while continuing to upgrade systems and strengthen its sustainability initiatives. By consistently advancing these efforts, Super One Foods ensures it remains a responsible community partner and environmental steward in the communities it serves for years to come.





**REDUCE
REUSE
RECYCLE
WITH SUPER ONE**

REDUCE

19 regional stores donate surplus food to local food agencies, including Second Harvest Northern Lakes Food Bank.

Over 596,035 lbs. of food donated annually.

Provides enough food for 475,828 meals each year.

SECOND HARVEST NORTHLAND

We proudly support similar food agencies in every community we serve!

REUSE

2024 STATS

35,985 reusable Super One tote boxes

25,764 reusable bags

Reuse

SUPER ONE CUSTOMERS LOVE REUSABLE OPTIONS!

Since 2008, over **562,000 REUSABLE OPTIONS SOLD**, including:

Insulated reusable bags Reusable green bags Super One Foods tote boxes

RECYCLE

ENERGY-SAVING INITIATIVES

LED lighting & smart refrigeration upgrades saved:

- + 7 million kWh of energy
- + Prevented 3,000+ tons of CO₂ emissions (equal to removing 650 cars from the road annually).

A new initiative called Air Curtains will be installed in all stores to reduce refrigeration energy use at night, saving around 60,000 kWh per store annually!

OUR IMPACT

2024: Recycled an estimated **4,971,000** plastic bags

Last 6 Years: Over **7,741,800** plastic bags recycled

Shrink Wrap Recycling: Over **211,780 lbs** processed each year

Cardboard Recycling: Over **9,792,000 lbs** recycled annually

This equals an astonishing 122+ semi-loads of just cardboard recycled per year!



SUPER ONE'S COMMITMENT TO RECYCLING

Super One provides **PLASTIC BAG** recycling receptacles at all store locations. Once full, collected bags are sent to Miner's Distribution Center, then to UNFI, where they are repurposed into Trex® Composite Decking and other materials.

SHRINK WRAP from store pallets is collected, baled, and sent for recycling.



CARDBOARD is collected at stores, baled, and transported for recycling.

empower fresh AI



*Turning data
into decisions.*

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Sustainable Farming, Premium Potato Products.

- Gold Level in the Sustainability Standard by Primus Auditing Ops
- Low-flow irrigation systems for soil & water conservation
- 1-megawatt solar farm
- Treating acid mine drainage water
- Using methane gas from a neighboring landfill



Sacramento, PA | masserspuds.com

