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SERVICES FOR SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

The Approach Towards Sustainability in the "Flor De Alfalfa" Company

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Abstract

In 2015, world leaders adopted a set of global goals to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda. Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next fifteen years. In order to achieve them, the governments, as well as the private sector and civil society, must all do their part. Mexico has taken action toward sustainability and the care of the natural environment, due to the impact of the economic and industrial development. Companies are key to directing the country to an important improvement with regard to sustainability. "Flor de Alfalfa" is a producer of cheese and other dairy products that observes practices aimed at sustainability in its daily activities, which act as the company's best *letter or recommendation,* so to speak. In this article, both the company's sustainability practices their opportunity areas are identified and analyzed. For this, the qualitative methodology and the documentary method were applied, via interviews and observation to analyze the related documents.

Keywords: sustainability, environmental care.

INTRODUCTION

This research project is conducted based on the analysis of the "Flor de Alfalfa" company concerning sustainability. The project was born out of a visit to Flor de Alfalfa, where it was easy to witness how they carry out some of their activities, such as livestock farming. Their practices of respect for animals and biodiversity turned out to be novel. Considering that practices that generate exceptional performance deserve to be extended into the industry for

the attainment of the common good, we decided to delve deeper and explore the processes involved in the company's day-to-day activities.

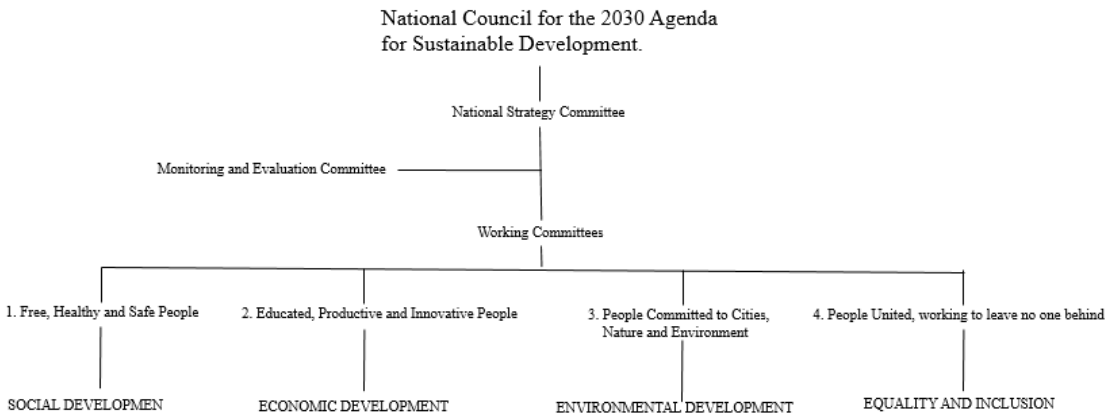
We could verify that the company has a vision guiding its actions, that its history has been characterized by contributions of value in the observation of sustainability, and also that it needs to generate a more impactful synergy with the community and with different audiences. In the latter aspect it will be necessary to resort to strategies that observe the ODS (Objective of Sustainable Development) more extensively, for which reason this work makes suggestions or proposes corrections in order to improve the sustainability performance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sustainability in Mexico

Mexico has had to include the environmental agenda and the Objectives of Sustainable Development (ODS); the following structure was created (Gobierno de México, 2019) [1]:

Figure 1. Structure of the National Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Source: UNESCO National Development Plan Mexico 2019-2024, 2019).

- The National Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, linking Mexico's executive, legislative and judiciary power, was created for the design, monitoring, execution, and evaluation of the actions aiming for the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.
- The Specialized Technical Committee of the Objectives of Sustainable Development (CTEODS) was created. It coordinates the generation and update of data and indicators to monitor the fulfillment of the ODS.
- The Work Group for the Legislative Monitoring of the ODS (GTODS) was constituted as a temporary institution that supported the diagnosis of the legislative capacities to attend the 2030 Agenda in Mexico.
- The Commission for the Fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda of the National Conference of Governors (CONAGO), is a mechanism that coordinates the Organs of Monitoring and

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Implementation (OSI) toward the fulfillment of the Objectives of Sustainable Development (ODS).
- The Organs of Monitoring and Implementation were aimed at generating communication strategies, goals and indicators, annual reports, and diagnoses on the application of the 2030 Agenda at a country level.

In 2020 strategies were proposed to be able to fulfill the goals set out more easily. Some of these strategies were directed to the economic and business sectors, such as updating the laws, and requiring obligatorily that companies as well as municipalities included in their development plans their achievements and delimitation to their development goals. This was also aimed to disassociate economic growth from environmental deterioration, encouraging the making of companies' sustainability reports, and the creation of programs promoting best practices (Government of Mexico, 2020) [2].

This resulted in some programs like:
- Tax on carbon. It is applied to fossil fuels, aiming to reduce consumption of this type of product (SEMARNAT, sf) [3].
- Emissions Trading System. It is a market-based instrument to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It operates under the cap-and-trade principle, whereby a maximum cap is established for the sectors of the economy, and which is reduced every year. The sectors pay an emission allowance for each CO2 ton issued.
- Climate Change Fund. Captures resources to address the challenges of climate change.
- Fund for Energy Transition and Sustainable Energy Use (FOTEASE). It is supported by the Law of Energy Transition; it focuses on power efficiency, considering options such as the use of renewable energies (Ministry of Energy, 2021) [4].
- Certificates of Clean Energy. (CEL) It is a market instrument, a title issued by the Energy Regulatory Commission, which price depends on supply and demand. It protects 1 MWh of clean electrical energy (Energy Regulatory Commission, 2016) [5].
- Clean Development Mechanism (MDL) They are procedures derived from the protocol of Kyoto. Developed countries can finance projects aimed at reducing greenhouse gases and obtaining emission reduction certificates in exchange, so countries like Mexico can benefit from technology transfer, investment flows, and improved sustainable development policies (National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change, 2018) [6].
- Nationally Appropriate Actions of Mitigation (NAMA). They are voluntary actions, also aimed at the reduction of greenhouse gases (GEI). There are three types: unilateral, that do not receive support from third parties, supported (whether financially and/or technologically), and accredited, which can be sold in the carbon market (National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change, 2018) [6].

Sustainability Actions in The Livestock Sector and in the Dairy Producers' Sector

Logically, livestock and dairy production are closely interrelated, so it is necessary to analyze their impact on the environment and on sustainability, and to make proposals that will help meet the needs for future welfare.

Firstly, it is necessary to observe the route of the processes in which the company is directly or indirectly involved from an integrating perspective, that is, being aware of the components of the value chain backward and forward, with emphasis on the monitoring of the water and carbon footprints generated. This will make it possible to analyze earth use, agriculture activities, energy use, waste generation, fossil fuel use, and the impact of industrial processes (Arce, 2018) [7].

Figure 2. Route of the industry processes.



Source. Arce (2018)

In 2009, the Global Dairy Agenda for Action (GDAA) was formed with the participation of leading organizations in world milk production, such as the European Dairy Association (EDA), the Eastern and Southern Africa Dairy Association (ESADA), the Pan American Dairy Federation (FEPALE), the Global Dairy Platform (GDP), the International Dairy Federation (FIL) the Sustainable Agriculture Platform Initiative (SAI), the Pan American Dairy Federation (FEPALE), the Global Dairy Platform (GDP), the International Dairy Federation (IDF), and the Sustainable Agriculture Platform Initiative (SAI), to generate strategies for the planet and sustainability (Acuña,2017) [8]. The aforementioned program can be implemented or carried out at different levels, for example, at the company level, or by a specific sector, at country level, etc. It contains eleven criteria of sustainability:

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Greenhouse gases The GEI are quantified and reduced throughout the chain of value, through all the economically viable mechanisms.	**Soil nutrients** Nutrient application is managed to minimize impacts on water and air while maintaining and improving soil quality.	**Waste** Waste generation is minimized, and where it is unavoidable to generate waste, it is reused and recycled.
Water Water availability, as well as water quality, are responsibly managed throughout the value chain.	**Soils** Soil quality and soil retaining capacity are proactively managed and improved to ensure optimal productivity.	**Biodiversity** Direct and indirect risks and opportunities of biodiversity are understood, and strategies are put in place to to maintain or enhance biodiversity.
Market development The members throughout the dairy value chain are able to build economically viable businesses through the development of transparent and effective markets.	**Rural economy** The dairy sector contributes to the resilience and economic viability of producers and rural communities.	**Labor conditions** Throughout the dairy value chain, workers operate in a safe environment and their rights are respected and promoted.
Product safety and quality The integrity and transparency of the dairy value chain are safeguarded so as to ensure optimal nutrition, innocuousness and product quality.	**Animal care** Dairy animals are treated with care, and are free from hunger and thirst, discomfort, pain, injury and disease, fear and distress, and are able to exhibit relatively normal patterns of behavior.	

Table 1 Sustainability Framework Criteria for the Dairy Industry and its Strategic Objectives (Acuña, 2017) [8].

For its implementation it is suggested:

1. To conduct a survey and analyze the company's alignment with the 11 proposed sustainability criteria, contemplating the participation of various actors.
2. To define priorities according to the necessities of the organization.
3. To implement initiatives and to define goals, indicators and deadlines that will be followed up upon and monitored.
4. To report on performance.

The Best Practices to be a Sustainable Company

In order for a company to be sustainable, it must consider premises such as those set forth by Sarandón (2006) [9]: to be productive enough, to be economically viable, to be ecologically

adequate, and to be culturally and socially acceptable, all of which must be delimited and considered in the company's mission and vision.

The reasons why a company should manage its processes taking into consideration environmental care have to do with the benefits this will render as shown in the figure below:

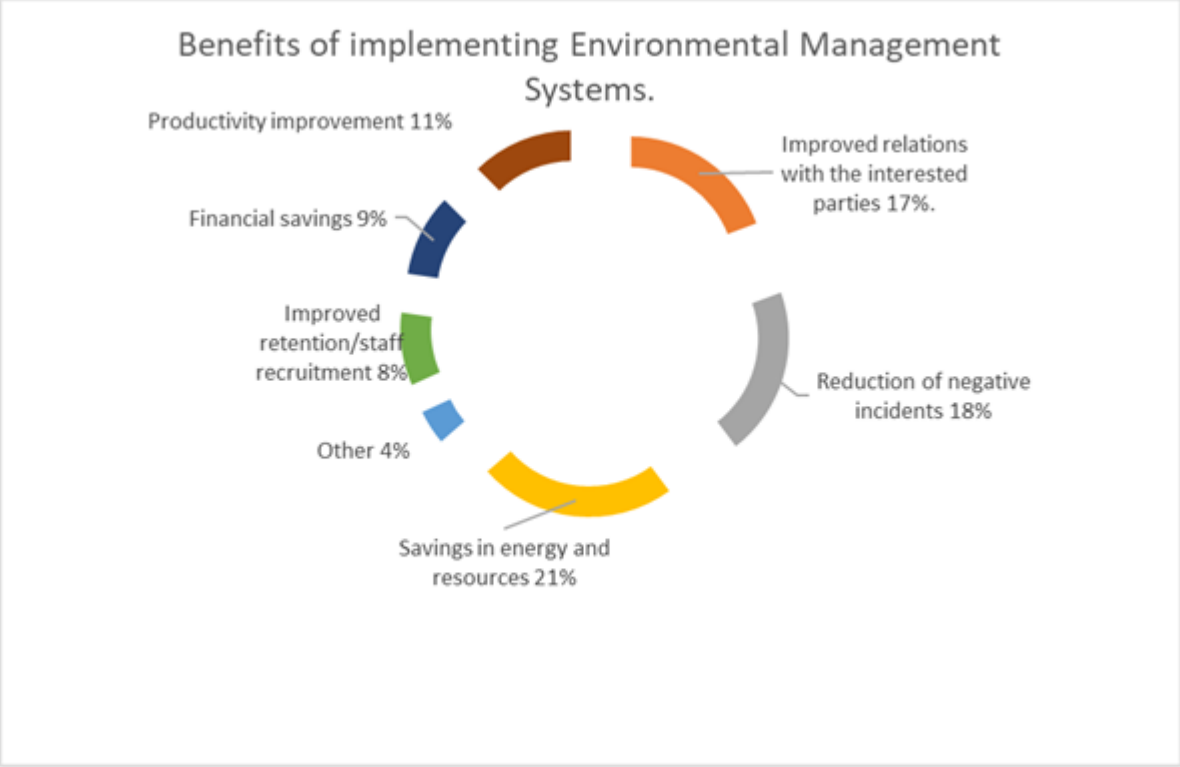


Figure 3. Benefits of Implementing Environmental Management Systems.
Source: (Chamber of Commerce of Spain, 2020) [10].

To be sustainable also means to take into account the type of company, to have the vision of maintaining a highly durable business, and to be an exemplary employer who highly appreciates people (California Wines, n.d.) [11]. The company should produce a minimum negative impact on the community where it operates but rather a greater positive impact compared to any negative impact produced (it is desirable that no negative impact is produced at all) (Asevex, n.d.) [12], with regard to:

- The social and economic aspects of the operation. Recognizing the employees: with bonuses, with support to their professional development, and with policies of medical care and health prevention. Promoting work-life balance. Having company representatives who establish and strengthen relations with the community, and that participate in meetings with the neighbors and others. Raising awareness on issues such as gender violence, child abuse in the community, etc. The objective is for the company to generate impact, beyond economic operations or profit. However, corporate social responsibility should not be confused with philanthropy. Corporate social responsibility

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is something much more inclusive in which corporate profit is balanced with positive benefits to the environment (Spanish Chamber of Commerce, 2020) [10].

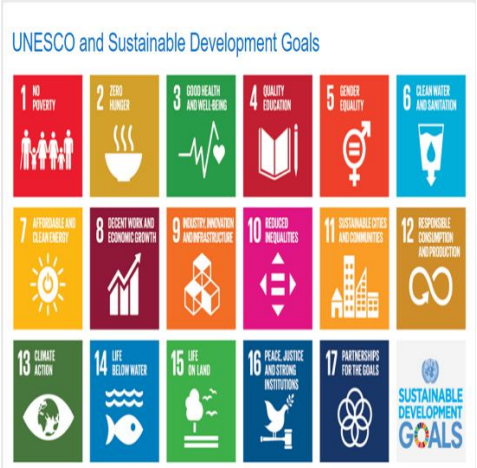
How?	Achievements for the Community	Impacts on the Community
Why?		People Organizations Environment
What cause?	Achievements for the Entity	Impacts on the Entity
Where?		Volunteers - Entity
Collaborators	Multiplier Effect	Impacts on Collaborators
	Achievements for the collaborators	Volunteers Collaborators

Figure 4. The methodology for the measurement, management and communication of the corporate social action in Spain

Source (Chamber of Commerce of Spain, 2020) [10]

- The environmental and cultural impacts of the operation. Involving the community in the development and implementation of recycling programs and management, training people on the classification and destination of solid urban waste and searching for ways to dispose of it. Having business ethics, values and principles that the company extends to its personnel through a code of ethics, is like having a letter of recommendation at display for everyone to see.
- Purchases and sales in the locality and region. With them, the company moves the local economy, which creates great value for the local families.
- The relation with the local institutions. Maintaining close relationships with the local institutions fostering an active participation with schools, civil society organizations, etc.

Based on the information previously described, an instrument guide to make an interview at the company "FLOR DE ALFALFA" was designed.

OBJECTIVE: To be able to have an approach to the practices aimed at the sustainability of a company producing milk and its derivatives.

1. Do you have an environmental program or agenda for the observance of sustainability in your processes and activities? In general terms, what does the company's sustainability strategy consist of?

2. Have you received recognition or any awards for your processes or products for the work done in this area?
3. Are you aware of the incentives granted at the state and national levels to direct companies to sustainable development?
4. How do you ensure your personnel's welfare and development?
5. Do you take part in social initiatives aimed at local development?
6. Would you consider your final product to be sustainable? Why so?
7. Do you have a water control, care and management facility?
8. In carrying out your activities, how do you seek to protect wildlife and impact the ecosystem?
9. Do you have a waste management strategy in place?
10. Have you implemented the use of renewable energies?
11. Considering that circular economy is that which contemplates the use and disposal of materials in favor of reuse and recycling, in areas do you work under the vision of circular economy?
12. Explain why you consider that your company has responsible sourcing? Speaking of the supply chain, do the values and sustainable vision extend to your suppliers and customers?
13. Are your innovation and automation processes environmentally responsible and with an approach to good practices?
14. How is compliance with the sanitary - innocuousness status ensured?
15. What are the actions taken to develop livestock farming with a sustainable approach?
16. What actions are being taken to lessen the negative impact on the use of the land, the effects of grazing, and the effects on biodiversity?
17. Have some of the following actions been carried out?
    a. Reforestation of spaces or rehabilitation of grasslands.
    b. Live fences and windbreak barriers adaptation.
    c. Plantations for protection of the ground and water channels.
    d. Control of grazing in degraded zones.
    e. Establishment of an ecological reserve.
18. In what conditions does animal production occur? How is its well-being procured?
19. How do you collaborate in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions? Is there a measurement system in place?

Flor de alfalfa

The company is a producer and marketer of dairy products with more than 25 years in business. It accounts for more than 45 workers. It is located in the state of Querétaro, in the municipality of Colon. Its philosophy is based on the quality, naturalness, and craftsmanship of the products it offers.

Under the slogan of “well-being from the start” and a policy of opened doors, their *raison d'être* or reason of being can be summarized as follows:

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"To produce and commercialize foods elaborated with the best raw materials from the fields and following the most respectful production processes, resulting in products of greater quality that keep their natural essence. At Flor de Alfalfa we pay special attention to the resources' origin, animal welfare, and the care for the environment, seeking it all to show in the taste, texture, and health properties of our products. We want consumers to value the great qualities of our products and all of the company's collaborators to feel proud of the results of their efforts".

Considering the above, the company strives to perform its activities with an approach to raw materials' quality, transparency in their products' origin, their animals' well-being, care for the environment, and passion for the land and their artisan processes.

Undoubtedly the main actors are the Jersey cows of the Rancho la Hondonada, which account for the company's livestock and produce milk, the main input of the products. The care for the land, the growing of the grasslands, the enrichment of the soil and a suitable mixture of grass, constitute the constant strategy to attain quality products. The company has been recognized by the Mexican Association of Registered Jersey Cattle Breeders, A.C. They have a Free Herd Certificate and documentation that guarantees the quality of the cattle.

The products offered are: natural yogurt in different flavors; 12 varieties of cheese (cheese roll, panela, asadero, Oaxaca, Otomí, natural manchego, botanero with chipotle, botanero with jalapeño and epazote, manchego with wine, Chihuahua, provolone cheese, pizza cheese); jocoque, milk candy, cream, butter, and long-ripened cheese such as montañés albahaca, montañés al vino, campanelo, romano, provoleta, queso indiano, and pomelo. This company is part of the Queretano Cheese Association.

At the beginning their products were marketed selling them door-to-door to small businesses, but today the company has gained market share and it has a presence in large stores such as Comercial Mexicana, Costco, Soriana, Walmart, Chedraui, among others.

It has also introduced the service of guided visits so that people can see how they work and so that they can have the experience of approaching the field, the cattle, and the production process of cheese and other derivatives.

METHODOLOGY

This is a study of the "FLOR DE ALFALFA" company that analyzes the way in which it assumes the issue of sustainability in the performance of its activities and operation. It is based on normative support and on identifying outstanding practices of the industry, as well as those areas susceptible of improvement and the activities that could be incorporated to lead the company to a desirable environmental-sustainable performance.

The instruments used, are:
Questionnaire as guide of interview/interviews to the personnel of the company.

Visits to the company to observe their processes and gather information provided by the company for analysis, be it in manuals, policies, environmental agenda, etc.

The information gathered will be analyzed to detect improvement areas with regard to sustainability issues, which will lead to suggestions for strategies or to resources that can be used to achieve the company's objectives.

In this case, the materials and resources to be used are transportation to get to the company, a computer to process the information, means of communication such as cellular telephones, and other types of resources, such as printouts, etc. There are no limitations considered to exist here.

ANALYSIS

The "Flor de Alfalfa" company does not have an environmental agenda, however, there are some outstanding practices that undoubtedly constitute a great contribution to environmental care and sustainability:

It should be noted that the innocuousness of the processes and the products is ensured by the observation of the BCR standards and the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP System).

Livestock Farming

Jersey cows are considered to be suitable, to generate less methane, to be more compact and to produce excellent milk with up to 20% more protein, fat and sugars than other breeds, due to their level of food utilization. Free grazing is one of the practices that Flor de Alfalfa uses to reduce their animals' stress: they just monitor the animals' movement with an identifier called pedometer. At birth, each animal is registered with a birth certificate before the Jersey association.

The following are the stages of the cow's development and growth:
Pre-school. They learn to socialize and to use the sucker.
Elementary. They begin to taste forage and the food concentrate.
Secondary. They learn the electrical boundary of its grasslands.
Junior High. They learn to graze in strips within the grasslands.

The challenge and objective of all efforts in terms of cattle are to meet the nutritional requirements of each farm animal, and to take care of them in terms of the service that the animals provide, so, they are cold they are protected with whatever is necessary, even with a sweater; the animals' udders are also taken care of to avoid infections, they are weighed. Animals are provided with a suitable environment that does not cause them stress, and they are get music played to them. There are no chemically induced births, animals are not inoculated with hormones, and the use of too many antibiotics is avoided.

There are other animals like horses, hens and lambs, that eat what cows do not, all of this under supervision and sustainable care of the land.

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Cattle graze by strips delimited by electric shepherds which do not harm the cows and delimit areas that, once exploited, will be put to rest and rehabilitation for a period of 40 days.

The biodigestor treats the biofertilizer with bacteria before it is distributed in the grasslands with a pipe, where it is easily absorbed. The lands are certified as organic through Metrocert, and under the vision of Mexico's Organic Products Law (LPO).

Neither Herbicide No Chemical Fertilizers are Used.
For the company it is all about respecting biodiversity, there is no unnecessary pruning, and insects, birds and others all have a place in the balance of the ranch (Rancho La Hondonada) and the company.

More than 8 thousand trees have been planted throughout the Rancho.

Plants like cactuses and rose bushes, placed at the limits of the property, are used for water containment as well as for the protection of the land.

Irrigation is done with well water (they have 5 wells) and sprinkler systems for better use of the water. Soapy waters are treated, and waters from the plant are used for the grasslands.
The processes and the people.

There are more than 45 people working, being the milker a key position because he deals with cattle.

Sustainable plans or programs for them and the community have not been created, although it does not discard to future. There have been initiatives like qualification, familiar coexistence, support to prestudents and campaign of garbage collection of the zone, nevertheless, has not occurred to pursuit and continuity them.

Use of Energy
The biodigestor processes the dung (the 8 cows produce from 6 to metric ton of dung) and generates energy (gas) to produce steam, which is used to warm up milk and to make cheese. represents a saving of the 80% consumption gas butane.

It agrees to emphasize that it is not possible to be let consume electrical energy and by policy of the country, the one that is generated of alternative way, is added to the national production and it is deduced of the particular cost of the company.

The remainders
In this subject, it is the project of the disposition of packages in Cotsco, by means of a zone of harvesting.

CONCLUSIONS

The Flor de Alfalfa dairy company and Rancho la Hondonada are exemplary business units in the state of Querétaro due to their business structure based on putting into practice elements

of sustainability and care for the environment, thus participating in the economic sector of organic and artisanal production. Even if the practice of elements of sustainability reflect in activities such as the free grazing of a special breed of cows (Jersey), care of the soil, reuse of ranch waste through biodigesters, self-generation of energy (gas), application of recognized work and quality standards, the absence of use of herbicides and chemical fertilizers, reforestation, and allowing insects and other types of fauna to coexist in the area, among others, activities, it must be recognized that there is a need to establish an environmental agenda that allows for the organization of activities, processes and objectives, so that they can be followed up and subsequently analyzed. Having an environmental agenda will enable the company to follow the route described by Arce (2018) [7], in which the footprint of the productive activity can be traced in the aspects of land use, agriculture, energy, waste, fossil fuels and purely artisanal and organic processes. As for monitoring and measurement, it would also be convenient to add the indicators of the sustainability criteria described in the Global Dairy Action Agenda, which are greenhouse gas emissions, soil nutrients, waste, water, soil, biodiversity, market development, rural economy, working conditions, product safety and quality, and animal care (Acuña, 2017) [8]. Within this environmental agenda, in order to implement the program or agenda, it is suggested to incorporate the four stages of the Reporting Process as described in the Global Dairy Action Agenda.

Likewise, the environmental agenda, in general, could adopt more extensive strategies such as:

- Taking advantage of platforms for dialogue and participation of the sector.
- Following up on the use of fossil fuels, and low-emission transportation, among others.
- Taking note on the impact of bottling, packaging and distribution of products.
- Regarding the use of energy, they need to explore more alternatives such as wind, solar, and LED. Control of energy expenditure will allow them to detect opportunity areas.
- Regarding disposal of waste, it is necessary to specify and to comply with waste separation and hazardous waste management policies for responsible handling, management and removal. It is advisable to adopt practices of reuse and recycling of materials.
- Regarding staff development and community support, it is also necessary to devise strategies that lead to greater staff satisfaction, performance and retention. Supporting the community means building important partnerships.
- Keeping closer and more detailed track of water use. Use sensors and other technologies within the company's reach.
- Making responsible purchases, establishing a supplier development system in accordance with the company's vision of sustainability and environmental care.
- It is convenient to evaluate the sustainability of the product up to its final distribution: undoubtedly the company has achieved important milestones has had a remarkable path in terms of production, but there are still other aspects to consider such as components in the product’s presentation and the way in which it is marketed in relation to the resources used.

The company must be aware that production under the criteria of sustainability and care for the environment in an economy such as the Mexican economy requires being productive

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enough, economically viable, ecologically adequate, and culturally and socially acceptable Sarandon (2006) [9] because it competes with companies that produce similar products, but under purely industrial criteria.

These suggestions can be applied by similar companies within the agricultural sector and subsequently observe the possible benefits to be obtained.

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