

MARKON COOPERATIVE

The Heart of Foodservice

HEAD OFFICE: Salinas, CA

TYPE OF OPERATION: Cooperative

NO. OF EMPLOYEES: 48

ESTABLISHED: 1985

WEB: markon.com

HIGHLIGHTS

- Founding member of the Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops
- Conducts distributor sustainability benchmarking

CONTEXT / BACKGROUND

Markon was established in 1985 when it became the first foodservice produce cooperative in North America, representing established brands such as Gordon Food Service, GFS Canada., Shamrock Foods, Nicholas & Company, Ben E. Keith Company, ProPacific Fresh, Maines Paper & Food Service and Reinhart Food Service. Its members have 64 distribution centers in the US and Canada, and \$24 billion in annual sales. Markon purchases, markets, and brands its private brands, as well as grower/shipper brands. Additionally it provides hand-on quality and food safety assurance, and provides leadership in fresh produce practices on behalf of its distributor-member partners

APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY

Markon is well known for its leadership and being first in many industry innovations, starting with the establishment of the company, to hands-on quality assurance, packaging, product innovations, and food safety practices. Markon is a strong advocate for specific, measurable, and verifiable food safety practices, and has brought that philosophy to the area of sustainability. Markon believes that a practice-based approach (e.g. - growers must use drip irrigation or use compost) stifles innovation. Rather, Markon appreciates that growers know best how to grow crops - and Markon wants to help ensure that the growing, harvesting, and packing practices are conducted responsibly, and that a journey of continuous improvement is established.

Markon was an early advocate of sustainable practices, incorporating the same measure-to-manage approach to sustainability as it did with food safety. Markon is a founding member of the Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops (SISC), a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at developing a system for measuring sustainable performance throughout the specialty crop supply chain. When completed, the project will offer a suite of outcome-based metrics to enable operators at any point along the supply chain to benchmark, compare, and communicate their performance

SUSTAINABILITY: GROWER-SHIPPER PRACTICES

Markon advocates for grower partners to use the measure-to-manage approach to sustainability and evaluate using the SISC metrics. In doing so, growers will be able to benchmark with others their performance, thereby improving the opportunity to learn from each other. Currently SISC has metrics to measure:

- Energy Use
- Nutrients
- Soil
- Water Use

Metric development is still underway for pesticides, human resources, air quality, biodiversity, packaging, and waste.

(More about SISC can be found on the website at www.stewardshipindex.org)

SUSTAINABILITY: DISTRIBUTOR PRACTICES

As Markon is owned by eight privately-held companies, sustainability practices adoption varies amongst its member distributors. Markon has encouraged its members to evaluate the adoption and documentation of sustainability practices. Markon then shares the learnings amongst its members. As foodservice operators have not yet demonstrated a strong purchasing preference for sustainable distributors, many of the practices incorporated to date are based on a “good for the business” approach – that is, it makes the distributor more efficient and cost-effective, while reaping sustainable benefits as well.

Sustainability practices currently employed at various locations include:

- Energy-efficient controls on refrigeration systems
- LEED certification
- Water-saving appliances
- Recycling of shrink wrap, pallets, and cardboard
- Tractors that incorporate next-generation engines
- Improve routing software to reduce mileage
- Electronic transactions to reduce/eliminate paper waste
- Motion detectors for lighting and LED lighting
- Recycling of motor pool engine oil
- Reducing engine idle time
- Truck and equipment washes that utilize recycled water

Sustainability has become a buzzword in recent years, and the efforts of many companies are still driven not by values, but by risk management strategies. For Markon, stewardship of the environment, and treating all employees fairly and respectfully, and partnering with growers who share this philosophy, is ever more important. With its network of growers and members that span North America, Markon is leveraging its influence to make changes throughout the food chain, one sustainability initiative at a time.