

A case study in commercial sustainability

There's no doubting, the sustainability challenge is an increasingly important one – food security, climate change, global poverty, resource constraints, the list goes on. If we're to stand a chance, business simply has to be part of the solution.

With more than 680 stores and wholesale outlets throughout the country, Foodstuffs recognised the impact increased sustainability measures could have on its nationwide operations – both financially and environmentally.

With just one standard electricity meter on a commercial site, the main obstacle to improvement has been lack of visibility around how much energy has been used by what component in store. Because, if you don't know what's working efficiently and what's not, how do you know what to improve?

So last year the company began the sub-metering installation and reporting project. At the heart of this are seven sub-meters which

provide online access to energy use data, enabling members to see exactly where its energy is being used in store.

"For the stores inside the programme, the cost savings they are seeing through reduced energy use and the informative bi-monthly reporting they receive only represents the start of the wider benefits the system will deliver," sustainability manager Mike Sammons explains.

"More importantly, the visibility the sub-metering provides on where energy is used in store, will enable us to move to part two of our strategy, which is to work with members to identify the most cost-effective plan for each of the stores in the programme."



▲ Ross and Donna Jordan - NW Newlands SBN award winners

The part EECA funded project has been going from strength to strength with results surpassing all expectations and its results have enabled Foodstuffs to implement a number of high profile sustainability projects, Mike says.

"Previously a lot of businesses have seen sustainability as a costly luxury. Now they recognise that by delivering their services more efficiently, it's a win win, financially and economically."

And it seems it's a win for the company's owner operators too, with Newlands New World being awarded the top prize in the Mega Efficiency category at the finals of the Sustainable Business Network Awards held in Auckland last November.

The award recognised the innovation demonstrated by the store in being the first organisation to prove the concept of transcritical refrigeration in a supermarket environment in New Zealand.

"This is a new type of refrigeration system we put into two of our stores," Mike explains.

"A transcritical system uses 100 percent natural refrigerants. In terms of a supermarket application, this has the ability to reduce a store's carbon footprint by about 40 percent, which is really significant."

But the award doesn't recognise that the store put the system in, rather Mike says, it recognises that they were the first supermarket in the Southern Hemisphere which was prepared to take a punt on this technology.

"The transcritical refrigeration system was the first thing we looked at in terms of refrigeration and we're confident it delivers a superior model in terms of financial and environmental output.

"It was a trial project, so we monitored the system very closely for 12 months and the results of that monitoring period showed that we had proven the case study. Now we are expanding that system to other new stores, which are in various states of completion in the development process."

The Newlands store and the brand new Kumeu New World store represent a new generation of stores, with an estimated 40-50 percent smaller carbon footprint compared to stores of just five years ago.

Featuring transcritical refrigeration, energy efficient freezers with sliding lids, LED lighting and being one of the first stores to implement (with help from Envirowaste), the new waste procedures that aim to divert 90 percent of waste away from



▲ Rethink reusable bags



▲ NW Newlands energy efficient freezers

landfill, the new Kumeu store represents the benchmark for new builds.

But it's not just the new stores which are reflecting strong environmentally friendly practices.

Recent analysis has revealed some of Foodstuffs' most energy efficient stores are more than 10 years old. The owners have simply focussed on and invested in energy efficiency practices such as sub-metering, lids on freezers, T5 fluorescent lights and more recently, LEDs.

The outstanding performance of the sub-metering project has revealed what's possible with minimum investment but maximum commitment. The project has proven that 'no cost and low cost' solutions can result in energy reduction in excess of 10 percent in many cases.

With the plans this go-getter organisation has in place, this is just the beginning.

"The waste project is probably our biggest focus at the moment, looking to divert the maximum amount of 'back of store' waste away from landfill," Mike says.

Today the company's cardboard, plastic wrap, food waste and a number of other recyclables go off for reuse in other areas. If fit for human consumption, food waste is sent to charitable groups such as the Salvation Army and City Mission in Wellington. If it's fit for animal consumption it goes to stock feed, with the company working with local pig farms via the NZ Pork Board and a re-processor who manufactures stock feed for the dairy industry. Meat waste can go to the petfood industry or rendered down into tallow.

"Diverting waste to other productive uses wherever we can makes commercial sense to us and while a lot of our stores have only become involved with the programme in March, we are already up around 80 percent waste reduction, with a target of 90 percent within two years."

Packaging is another area of focus, with Auckland Council looking to include 'bin lift' charges to its wheeled bin rubbish collections in 2015. Foodstuffs began looking at how

to prevent increased disposal costs for its nationwide customer base by ensuring as much packaging as possible is free to dispose of through the kerbside recycling service.

As a result, Foodstuffs has been supplying stores with sustainable alternatives to the existing polystyrene food trays for use in departments outside butchery for the last six months.

Although butchery requirements have meant finding a cost-effective, equally functional, alternative to polystyrene foam has been more challenging, good progress has been made and the organisation is confident of offering stores a solution in the very near future.

"Because this is a really big challenge, we haven't put a time frame on this and we will be actively working in this area. All our stores now have kerbside recyclable trays in every department except butchery and we expect to offer recyclable alternatives to foam meat trays by early next year," Mike says.

Foodstuffs is also trialling plastic bag recycling during the next few months. Starting in Christchurch the system will see customers returning used bags to the store for recycling. Once the trial has been evaluated, Foodstuffs will decide whether to roll the programme out nationwide.

"We're also heavily promoting reusable bags in our stores at the moment," Mike says. "There's a real momentum building and through surveys we can see how enthusiastic our owners and customers are about our moves in this area."

"We are in a real position to put systems in place which will affect so many people's lives".

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