

## Country Crest: achieving excellence through measurement of sustainability criteria

### About the Company

Country Crest is one of the biggest suppliers of quality potatoes and onions to key multiple retailers, as well as a leading manufacturer and supplier of vegetable accompaniments and prepared wholesome meals. The company also provides a specialist agronomy service for growers, and assistance to meet the very high standards of crop husbandry required to achieve the specification set down by its customers. It employs in excess of 170 staff locally.

Country Crest was established in 1994 by brothers Michael and Gabriel Hoey. The Hoey Family has been growing fresh produce in North County Dublin for almost 100 years. The family business continues to cherish an unwaivering passion for the quality of the food it produces. It is committed to using local produce when available and has built up a significant local grower base. It also strives to integrate local meat and poultry produce in its prepared meals. The company's business ethos is centered on delivering quality food at affordable prices whilst working in a sustainable manner.

Business success is built around providing a quality product. Adherence to quality assurance steps is fundamental in achieving this: a coherent traceability programme forms an integral part of this quality control system. The company is an approved pre-packer of the Bord Bia (Irish Food Board) quality and hygiene system and it is registered with the Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association (IOFGA).

### Country Crest and Sustainability

Country Crest is aware of the requirement to be responsible towards the economy, society, environment, and human welfare. Its desire to improve people's lives, facilitate farming enterprises, promote food sustainability and contribute to raising the standard of living for those participating in deserving projects in less developed communities, is the basis of its sustainability strategy, which is embedded in its business objectives and operations.

A clean and healthy environment is central to the company's philosophy and its business decision-making. In addition to generating its own electricity through a wind turbine, Country Crest's contribution to a cleaner environment includes operating an integrated crop management system on the farm, using recyclable packaging, recycling the water used at the main pack-house, composting the green waste from the onion plant and using greener fuel in its truck fleet and heavy machinery.

*"The Land has been given to us and we are humble that it provides for us. It is important that we give back what we put in."* says Michael Hoey

The integration of sustainability within the business philosophy, coupled with the implementation of a variety of innovative sustainability initiatives, resulted in Country Crest winning the 2011 Bord Bia Food & Drink Industry Award in the sustainability category. Following the award, the company was invited to become a pilot company for Bord Bia's Origin Green sustainability development programme.

At the heart of Origin Green is a sustainability charter that commits participants to engage directly with the challenges of sustainability: reducing energy inputs, minimizing their overall carbon footprint and lessening their impact on the environment. In doing so, industry will also increase its overall efficiency and competitiveness.

As part of the Origin Green membership process, Country Crest submitted its unique sustainability plan, detailing the company's measurable sustainability goals in the areas of energy, water, waste and biodiversity over a five-year period. The fact that the company was already measuring

sustainability performance in all major areas such as energy consumption and water usage, simplified the process of determining goals in the selected sustainability categories.

### **Key Strategic Objectives of Country Crest's Origin Green Sustainability Plan**

To achieve its vision of growing the business with minimal impact on the environment, Country Crest's key strategic objectives are focused on being a viable, profitable company that continuously assesses its energy management and overall sustainability. Employee involvement and awareness will promote its sustainable ethos in the wider community. The company aims to meet its customers' sustainability requirements whilst promoting innovative ways to produce healthy, wholesome foods.

Management has placed the vision of sustainability at the top of its priority list, and sustainability has been put at the heart of its strategies, policies and activities. However, executing sustainability strategy effectively, and ensuring it returns value to the business, is not an easy task. Setting realistic targets aids this process as performance can be monitored more easily. The company views the measurement of performance criteria as fundamental in achieving its sustainability objectives.

### **Sustainability Targets**

Country Crest's sustainability plan submitted as part of the Origin Green membership process sets out in detail realistic and measurable goals over a five-year period under the headings of energy, waste, water and biodiversity.

Energy efficiency has been a major business concern for the company for a number of years. The first step in tackling energy efficiency is establishing a clear picture of consumption. Therefore energy usage on site has been monitored since 2004. It is hoped that by 2015 energy self-sufficiency will be achieved through its energy management system, an existing 800kW wind turbine and the planned anaerobic digester. This will be further complemented by a sustainable procurement policy for the facility, ensuring energy efficiency and lifecycle running costs are considered in capital investments, as well as changes in work practices aimed at reducing energy consumption.

Country Crest's waste management strategy is based on the principle of reduce, reuse and recycle. Not only is it the company's ambition to reduce the amount of waste produced, but also to divert from landfill to reusing or recycling. Furthermore, the upcoming introduction of an anaerobic digester will result in the recovery of organic waste materials, producing methane gas for electrical and thermal power, as well as high value fertilizer for the farm.

A number of initiatives aimed at reducing water consumption have already been implemented at site level. They include recycling of water and regular leak testing. By implementing a water conservation strategy and water management plan for the site, further reductions in water usage will be effected. The installation of additional water meters is key in this process and will identify individual water consumers for review.

Country Crest has a long established tradition of care for the land, which it farms and its surrounding environment. This has led to the establishment of an onsite wildlife sanctuary and various small-scale ecosystems, forming the basis of the company's biodiversity management plan. Over the coming five years the company anticipates establishing a biodiversity register, acting in relation to species (re) introduction, and achieving a 10% increase in biodiversity for the site.

### **Benefits of Origin Green Membership**

The creation of a significant point of differentiation for the Irish food and drink industry around the area of sustainability is one of the many benefits Origin Green membership brings with it. Participants receive assistance in relation to developing and managing sustainability within their organisation, and they have the opportunity to draw from the learning and knowledge of a network of peers in the food and drink sector.

Moreover, Bord Bia will communicate cumulative sustainability improvements under key headings to the international food business, while individual companies will be able to highlight their improvements as part of this independently verified programme. Through meeting business partners' needs for greater transparency in relation to sustainability, Irish food and drink producers are building long-term customer loyalty, and improving business performance.

“Being a proud member of Origin Green also benefits our business in maintaining existing customer relations, and more specifically, attracting new business partners, who share our passion, vision and journey for a more sustainable and eco – friendly future”.

### **The Future**

Country Crest will continue to measure performance, implement sustainability strategies and strive towards energy self-sufficiency. By embracing sustainability and by becoming an Origin Green member, Country Crest is future-proofing its business. Being a sustainability leader ensures the company meets the demands of retailers and wholesalers who select suppliers based on their carbon performance and sustainability credentials.