

Shenandoah Valley Organic

Finding success by focusing on farmers and the environment

Overview

Shenandoah Valley Organic in Harrisonburg is an organic poultry meat company that is committed to serving their stakeholders, from farmers to consumers, while striving to meet their sustainability goals. The company increases environmental stewardship through innovation on the farm, at the processing facility and at the corporate office.

How do you implement your Farmer Focus business model?

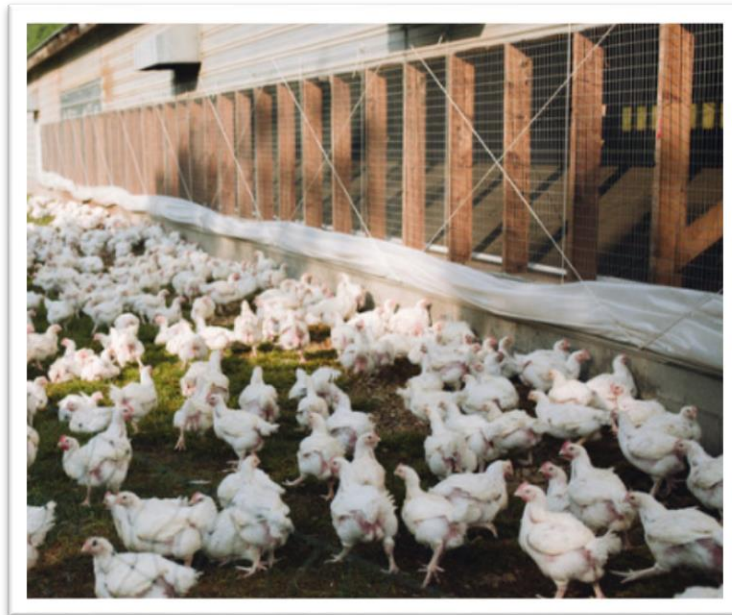
Shenandoah Valley Organic (SVO) believes that sustainable farming combines tradition, innovation and science to promote fair relationships and benefit the environment. This approach results in a good quality of life for all involved. While many companies view profits as the bottom line, SVO understands that single-minded farming practices come at a steep cost to the environment. Third party certified auditors inspect affiliated farms, reviewing things like the amount of time the chickens spend outside and the size of the outdoor area. These audits benefit the health of the animals and the environment.

How do you communicate sustainability to your stakeholders?

“Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.” This phrase has been around since the 70s and most people can tell you what the “3 Rs” are, which makes this an excellent way to implement and communicate environmental sustainability. Reduction comes first because it is the most important. If there is a plan in place to reduce, then there is not a need to reuse or recycle that end product. Reuse and recycle are also important because it decreases the amount of consumption occurring and in turn diverts waste sent to the landfill.

What are some best practices for reducing environmental impacts?

- Motion sensor LED lights reduce energy consumption and cut down on the need for fossil fuels.
- Natural lighting is used at the farm throughout the day as part of the SVO sustainable lighting program.
- Having an on-site wastewater treatment plant prevents contaminated water from reaching the soil and waterways.
- SVO is developing a plan to ban the use of polystyrene foam and replace it with reusable canteens.
- A research project is underway to use biochar in chicken bedding to reduce ammonia levels in poultry houses. This has the potential to benefit the health of the birds and reduce bacterial contamination in the environment.



Chickens roam outside their house at Redbud Acres

How does SVO find opportunities for reuse?

- Some companies require farmers to make expensive upgrades to housing or equipment before they will even work with them. For SVO, affiliated farmers are asked to reuse their chicken houses if they meet the right organic standards. Reusing existing structures saves materials and money for farmers.
- SVO is working on a new project that will reuse poultry litter by heating it to reduce pathogens and reapplying it as bedding for the next flock of birds.
- Water reclaim stations in the processing facility allow water to be reused instead of using more water from the city's supply or other sources.

How is Shenandoah Valley Organic planning to address recycling?

SVO has developed a recycling plan to address food waste as well as common recyclables like cardboard and plastic. The plan utilizes new bins to separate waste into categories: food waste, cardboard, plastic, etc. SVO is planning to have a cardboard compactor onsite to package it for easier recycling. Food waste will be composted, and in some cases, the compost will be used for the onsite garden beds. In addition to composting food waste, SVO plans to send biosolids created from the renderings of the processing facility to be composted locally.



SVO's new Farmer Focus Messaging

How does the company inform customers about green practices?

In addition to providing information about their green practices on the company's website, SVO ensures that all of their product labels and recyclable shipping packaging includes their Farmer Focus messaging. SVO also sponsors the Farm Aid festival and is a supplier of organic chicken for the concessions at the festival. Farm Aid's mission is to build a family farm-centered system of agriculture in America, which is closely in line with the Farmer Focus business model of SVO. In addition to reaching out to customers through events and their website, SVO is also active on social media through Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter. The company uses these platforms to keep customers informed and they recently switched their branding from Shenandoah Valley Organic to Farmer Focus on social media to highlight that supporting farmers is at the core of their business model.

How does continuous improvement play a role?

As the climate continues to change, SVO believes it is part of their responsibility as a company to improve upon sustainability programs by educating not only our employees but also the community members on what we are doing to reduce our environmental footprint. SVO is committed to environmental stewardship for the future of the environment and farmers. The plan is to have their set goals fully implemented by the end of 2020 and the company will continue to look for opportunities to choose the environmentally friendly options when making future decisions.