Making a sustainable impact on the cheese market

While consumers don’t see the Glanbia Nutritionals brand in grocery stores, it has a big footprint as one of the leading manufacturers of American-style cheese and whey. The company annually manufactures more than 900 million pounds of cheese at four plants in Idaho and New Mexico, and employs more than 1,600 people.

When customers began asking about Glanbia’s sustainability goals and progress, the executive team saw gaps. With foresight, they also recognized this was an opportunity to alter and improve the way they measured success in dairy processing.

They started with a single plant in Idaho. The team determined priority impact areas, measured social presence, determined metrics to demonstrate progress, and identified areas where additional resourcing was needed. Taking a bold step, they published a 2012 Sustainability Report. It was their first, and very public, declaration of goals and benchmarks.

By 2016, the company had replicated this approach with three more plants and adopted a global sustainability strategy that promises to “nurture, grow and sustain the lives of our employees, milk producers, customers, consumers and communities.”

The global rollout presented several challenges, including determining how to best measure performance in plants with different products and regulatory rules and inconsistent reporting practices.

Highlights of the global sustainability program include:

- Group-wide environmental and corporate responsibility programs, with specific, measurable goals;
- Annual environmental reporting across all operations in which efficiencies in everything from electricity to water use scored positive results;
- A “Nutrition for Society” framework to build health and wellness programs for employees and communities.

Glanbia says they could not accomplish their goals without the support of dairy farmers, supply chain partners and dairy groups such as the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy’s Sustainability Alliance.

Perhaps the most indelible indication that sustainability is here to stay at Glanbia is that it has found its way into the employee culture, as indicated by the importance placed on health, wellness, and safety. The journey of improvement will continue, but the effort to date sets Glanbia Nutritionals apart as a leader in sustainability.