MILGARD SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON | TACOMA

CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



OPERATIONS & LOGISTICS OPPORTUNITIES IN AN EXPANDING SUPERSTORE CHAIN

Introduction

Consumer demand for sustainable products and services continues to grow in the United States. According to a report by GlobalScan, 49% of Americans reported buying a sustainable product in 2025, a 6% increase from 2024 (GlobalScan 2025). An additional 36% of respondents to the same survey said they would like to; the survey found price was the leading factor for not purchasing sustainable goods (GlobalScan, 2025). These findings are consistent with prior research indicating cost is the main barrier to being more sustainable in almost all consumer generation groups (EY, 2023). In 2024, a worldwide survey by Capgemini indicated that 38% of consumers paid a 1-5% premium for a sustainable product while 39% paid a premium of up to 10% (Capgemeni, 2025).

In the United States, the idea of superstores, also called hypermarkets and “big box” stores, began in 1931 when Fred Meyer (now owned by Kroger) opened its first store in Portland, Oregon. Five-and-dimes and other variety store concepts like Woolworth and Kmart dated as far back as the late 1800s, but superstores began to broaden the categories of goods and services offered to consumers in a one-stop format. Most importantly, superstore chains could buy products wholesale in larger quantities at lower costs and pass along lower prices to customers.

Today, large discount retailers like Target and Walmart and warehouse clubs like Costco and Sam’s Club can offer even larger discounts to consumers due to their scale and purchasing power. Many of these companies offer a small amount of sustainable products as market demands dictate; they also incorporate sustainability practices into their operations and logistics since these practices often offer significant cost savings through resource and process efficiency. The idea of bringing a superstore model to sustainable products is not a new one, but it has not yet been implemented at a large scale.

References

GlobalScan. (2025). Sustainability in the USA: What Consumers Think and Expect in 2025. Globalscan. https://globescan.com/2025/04/22/sustainability-in-the-usa-report/

Capgemini. (2024). What matters most to today’s consumer: 2025 consumer behavior tracker for the consumer product and retail industries. Capgemini. https://www.capgemini.com/insights/research-library/what-matters-to-todays-consumer-2025/

EY. (July 27, 2023). Main barriers to being more sustainable according to consumers worldwide in 2023, by generation [Graph]. In Statista. Retrieved January 14, 2026, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/1445594/barriers-to-being-more-sustainable-worldwide-generation/



Resources

- What is sustainable supply chain management? | ASCM
- Building a green supply chain in 2025: best practices | CPSCP
- Supply Chain Sustainability | UN Global Compact

Unique Opportunity to Integrate Sustainability into Operations & Logistics in Preparation for Expansion

The fictional company Maria's Market started as a single natural foods grocery store in Old Town Tacoma in 2003. The company expanded to three stores in the South Sound by 2008 and added several new areas of focus in their retail offerings, including sustainability-focused home goods and activewear departments. By 2013, the company grew to 21 stores with over $610 Million in sales across Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Maria's also added more departments, including gardening and recreational apparel and equipment (including camping and athletics).

After successfully navigating the challenges of COVID and increasing sales each year through 2025, the company decided to expand to 55 stores across the western United States over the next ten years with sales projected to surpass $1 Billion. Although the store has always focused on local produce and products, Maria's also imports sustainable goods from almost every part of the world. With this new expansion plan, company leaders want to ensure Maria's values around sustainability are also applied to its operations and logistics. The COO has asked the corporate operations and logistics teams to analyze opportunities to integrate innovative sustainability efforts into its local and international operations as the company more than doubles the number of stores.

Case Study Charge

The COO has asked you to create a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation for the executive team on your analysis and suggestions of areas of opportunity for the company to focus on both from a local and global operations perspective. As is often the case with large enterprises, you may find dozens of opportunities that could provide value, so for this presentation, the COO has asked you to focus on what you feel are the top three opportunities to incorporate sustainability in operations and logistics.

It's important that you identify any of the company's current sustainability-focused practices that can be optimized, but the COO and executive team also want to fully understand current best practices in retail operations and logistics so Maria's Market can strive to be a leader in one or more areas and possibly introduce new innovative ideas in areas such as lifecycle cost analysis, calculating Scope 3 emissions, waste and packaging reduction, labor and human rights, etc. It will be important to include return-on-investment and cost-benefit analysis of your proposed opportunities, along with any important timelines to consider.