**Texas State University**

**Member Information**

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**Topic:** Cultivating an Ethic of Sustainability: Eliminating Food Waste

**Division:** Undergraduate

**Audience:** Dole Food Company Inc. Executive Board

**Executive Summary**

We the Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Board of Dole Food Company, in addressing the Executive Board, recommend that in the coming business cycles the issue of food waste and food loss should take a higher precedence. Food waste occurs at every part of the production chain: from food rotting on the ground at harvest time, to consumers prematurely throwing viable food into the garbage due to misleading expiration labels. Global attention has been tuned in to the ethical implications of food waste in the last few years. This is an opportunity for Dole to lead the industry in solving this problem.

**Ethical**

The operations of a business, particularly a business as large as Dole, impact the world in a significant and varied number of ways. On the one hand we produce food in a number of countries where the local people often struggle to feed themselves. On the other hand, overproduction at some of our farms poses problems when aggregated food waste results in environmental damage. On top of this, the industry standards of sale and labeling contribute to general confusion among consumers.

To account for these costs, a full consideration of the triple bottom line of profit, people, and planet is needed. As a founding principle for this consideration, we propose a land ethic, where the interests of the community are placed at the center of our thought; giving weight to all actors who reasonably claim a stake in our operations: shareholders, workers, consumers, and even land itself. This reorientation is aimed at our future. The ability of Dole to actually account for the cost of its operations depends on seeing the long term effects of its activities, and not just the immediate profit that will turn into future costs.

**Legal**

In our discussion of the legal dimensions of this issue we will address food waste laws, both in the United States and in other countries where Dole conducts business.  In the United States, there are no laws that specifically address the disposal of food, but laws exist that do provide protection and financial incentive to those who wish to donate food.  Additionally, there is no legal requirement for Dole to print expiration dates on its products. There are several countries that have recently enacted laws, or are in the process of creating laws, that restrict the disposal of food from grocery stores. Because of this shifting political and social climate, Dole should take greater responsibility for their products being sold at retail. Such actions will allow Dole to not only get ahead of legal repercussions originating from these international changes, but will also allow us to set an international precedent and become an ethical leader in the food production industry.

**Financial**

In the financial section of our report we will take an in-depth look at the fiscal implications that extra attention to the issue of food waste will yield in future profits. These implications include, but are not limited to, increased production efficiency, brand image, and consumer relations. Few elements of the plan will incur an increase in upfront fixed costs. For those costs that are incurred, the end-yield justifies the investment. In light of these considerations, we recommend Dole implement reforms to reduce waste at harvest, reform our approach to expiration labeling, and move to join the Food Waste Reduction Alliance in order to exchange ideas and coordinate efforts with other likeminded companies. Overall, addressing food waste does not need to eat into profits, and in fact, will prove beneficial to Dole’s bottom line.