WHAT IT’S ABOUT:

The SEKEM group, a set of eight companies, a development foundation, and several schools founded in 1977, has at its core a positive vision of a sustainable future “where all economic activity is conducted in accordance with ecological and ethical principles.” Its mission is carried out across the agriculture sector from farms to food processing and pharmaceuticals, as well as through the SEKEM Development Foundation and the Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development. The business arm of the group focuses on organic and biodynamic farming, organic cotton and textiles, pharmaceuticals, and sustainable ecological management.

The SEKEM Development Foundation operates several schools (from kindergarten through to vocational training), a medical centre, and a variety of social impact projects. Common to all these activity areas is the drive to improve the lives of Egyptians by investing in individual education and sustainable livelihoods, conserving the environment and giving back to the community.

For SEKEM to advance its objectives, it demonstrates to its upstream suppliers, employees, communities, and customers that they can live better lives by adopting sustainable practices in their farming, business practices, and consumption and waste management habits. Each stakeholder group has a different set of motivating factors. Farmers are most concerned with increasing incomes and reducing costs, soil sustainability, and the health impacts of herbicide, insecticide, and fertilizer use. Food processors and producers are focused on efficiency, cost-savings, and practices that increase their ability to sell their products. Consumers, meanwhile, tend to care most about the cost of food, the impacts on their health, and the environmental impacts of their consumption choices. SEKEM aims to pay decent incomes for its employees as well as for people employed by partners or living in the communities in which they operate, as well as access to education and health services and has been internationally recognized as a model for sustainable development and social entrepreneurship for its efforts in this area.
**PRINCIPLES IN ACTION**

**BETTER LIVING**

SEKEM’s efforts to grow the sustainable agricultural sector and support farmers in transitioning to organic and biodynamic agricultural practices results in improved livelihoods and health for farmers and their communities, as well as more sustainable and healthy soils and environment. SEKEM provides ongoing training and knowledge transfer for farmers, employees, and community members on sustainable development, culture, and the arts, produces responsible products, and encourages communities, retailers, and customers to engage in responsible consumption and waste management.

**IMPACT**

SEKEM takes a four-fold approach to designing for impact across economic, cultural, societal, and ecological benefits. Its activities are measured on a Sustainable Development Scorecard, which allows SEKEM to track progress on yearly goals set for each impact area. Published in a series of annual reports, the scorecard also captures areas where targets and goals have not been met. For example, in 2015 SEKEM reports failing to meet fuel reduction and well water access targets, as well as a lag in improving the availability and micro-nutrient density of compost. This process helps to ensure that SEKEM’s management remains sensitive to both the positive impacts and unintended consequences of their projects.

**SYSTEMIC**

By taking a full systems approach to its business operations, SEKEM influences upstream producers through training and education, and downstream consumers through community engagement and product marketing. SEKEM’s integration of environmental sustainability into its core business model means that at all stages it considers waste, water, soil health, and other sustainability benefits.

SEKEM’s view of sustainability encompasses the education and the societal health of communities and provides support for more balanced and healthy living. SEKEM operational values include equal treatment, embracing diversity, working to enhance literacy, and championing human rights.

**RESPONSIVE**

As noted, the review process allows SEKEM to build on successes and to learn across companies and activity areas. For example, successful implementation of a soil enrichment project that extends the life of arable land can have transferable lessons for sustainable desert reclamation projects. Likewise, the Sustainable Development Scorecard review system has been very successful for SEKEM’s management teams, and as such the technology is now being transmitted up the supply chain and will be adopted by SEKEM’s supplying farmers.
SEKEM makes use of social media to communicate with its customers, suppliers, and community. This communications channel allows for dialogue around products and services, making it easier for stakeholders to provide feedback and impressions on the activities and products of the SEKEM group.

COMMUNICATIONS TAKEAWAYS

Connecting with Audiences: Aim to Address Multiple Needs in a Holistic Way

Engage stakeholders as whole people and respond to the diversity of their needs and wants. SEKEM engages stakeholders in ways that address their multiple needs including paying a living wage, providing meaningful employment, and living healthy lives. SEKEM not only focuses on workers themselves but extends its efforts to improve the sustainability of everyone they touch in the system including producers, community members, and farmers.

Strategy: Lead by Example

Sometimes the best message you can send is that you are succeeding by utilizing sustainable practices. When stakeholders and other businesses see that it is both possible and profitable to operate a business in an environmentally and socially responsible way, they will be more open to adopting new behaviours themselves. SEKEM has had good success in this regard, as upstream and downstream business partners (farmers, retailers) have come on board and shifted their practices.

MORE INFORMATION

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