



FAMILY  
ENTERPRISE  
CANADA

CASE STUDY

# Sustainability Indicators for Family Business

## BURNBRAE FARMS LIMITED

Purpose, prosperity, and renewal  
through sustainable thinking



### CORE BUSINESS:

Egg production, grading, processing, farming

### INDUSTRY:

Retail grocers, food services, bakeries, industrial clients

### FAMILY ENTERPRISE HISTORY:

6<sup>th</sup> generation

### HEADQUARTERS:

Lyn, Ontario

### EMPLOYEES:

1,700+

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## A BRIEF HISTORY

“Families are remarkable communities, most notably for their blood bond,” author Ulrich Frisse opines in the prelude of *Eggs For Life*, a homespun narrative that traces the history of sixth-generation Burnbrae Farms, whose origins stretch back more than a century. “When you combine a family with a business, the result can be a powerful explosion of effort [...] and a quiet continuous knitting of multigenerational bonds.” Frisse is right in more ways than one.

Today, Burnbrae Farms is a leader in the Canadian agri-food industry and a national supplier of eggs and egg products. Its story began in 1891 when Joseph and Jean Hudson signed the deed to a 100-acre farm they purchased in Lyn, Ont., naming it Burnbrae, “burn” being Scottish for stream and “brae” for a hillside. Fifty-two years later, grandsons Joe and Grant introduced egg laying hens to the dairy farm setting in motion a stellar legacy. Burnbrae it is still owned and operated by the Hudson family.

While many factors have played into Burnbrae Farms’ longevity, its robust and earnest approach towards **sustainability** (however the social goal may be defined) is an ethical business model worth emulating. Some view sustainability through the lens of our capacity to improve the state and availability of sought-after materials or environmental conditions over the long term. Others view sustainability more broadly, such as protecting the long-term viability of our communities.

## KEY NUMBERS

**1,700**

Burnbrae Farms employs more than **1,700** workers across Canada.

**400**

The 134-year-old company partners with more than **400** farmers nationwide.

**7-8-3-2**

Burnbrae Farms is Canada’s largest family-owned and operated egg business with **seven** wholly-owned farms, **eight** grading stations, **three** processing plants, and **two** distribution centres.

Burnbrae’s approach blends business and societal practice – indeed, best practice – as forms of intergenerational ethics. In other words, Burnbrae’s business mission elegantly dovetails with its sustainability framework, a set of enduring initiatives the company is executing to help Canadians ethically meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.

To get there, the 134-year-old company has rolled out an ambitious plan and sustainability report card to track its actual progress.



## TIMELINE OF TRIUMPHS

The sixth-generation Hudson family have kept Burnbrae Farms on an upward trajectory for 134 years.

**1891**

Joseph Hudson purchases a dairy farm in Lyn, Ont. and names it Burnbrae.

**1943**

Arthur's second son, Joe Hudson, via a poultry project at Brockville Collegiate Institute, raises 50 leghorn chicks to laying hens.

**1952**

The first laying barn is constructed. In **1956**, the Barn is expanded to hold 20,000 layers.

**1973**

Burnbrae Farms builds a farm in St-Zotique, Que. and builds a grading station in 1981. Like the Lyn operation, the station not only grades eggs from its own location but also purchases and grades eggs from outside producers.

**1981**

Plant acquired in Mississauga, Ont. where eggs are purchased for grading/distribution from producers in western Ontario.

**1996**

Burnbrae Farms expands grading and breaking operations into Manitoba with the acquisition of three grading stations that are consolidated into one and the acquisition of a breaking plant. In 2000, a farm in southern Manitoba is purchased.

**2006**

Brockville, Ont. production facility established for cooked items (hard boiled eggs and patties and omelets).

**2019**

Burnbrae constructs a solar-powered free range egg farm in Woodstock, Ont. – Canada's largest.

**1939**

Arthur Joseph, who has taken over the farm, is joined by his son Grant in running the farm.

**1943**

Egg layers are a sideline managed by Joe and Grant Hudson. By **1948**, laying hens increase to 3,000.

**1973**

"Further processing" plant established in Lyn to pasteurize eggs for bakeries, hotels, restaurants and industrial trade.

**1978**

Burnbrae Farms acquires Maple Lynn Foods Limited of Strathroy-Caradoc, Ont. and commences grading eggs from producers in western Ontario.

**1983**

Plant acquired in Upton, Que.; Burnbrae expands its egg breaking and pasteurization operations.

**2001**

Grading station acquired in Calgary. Winnipeg and Calgary eggs collected from local farmers that are graded for delivery to retailers in western Canada.

**2007**

Burnbrae Farms acquires Westholme, B.C.-based grading station Island Eggs.

**2021**

Burnbrae Farms builds a solar field in Lyn Ontario, which is a series solar panels that generate solar energy used in operations.



## TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

As a privately-owned enterprise, Burnbrae Farms values accountability and transparency. As Canada's leading egg producer, the company is committed to driving positive change within the egg industry's sustainability journey. Burnbrae works with Delphi, a Canadian decarbonization consultancy, to quantify its annual greenhouse (GHG) gas emissions. The company also participates in the Carbon Disclosure Project and receives ratings from leading sustainability audit organizations such as EcoVadis, Thesis, and Supply Shift.

Burnbrae's emissions calculations adhere to the joint World Resources Institute/World Business Council for Sustainable Development's emissions protocol, the standard in corporate GHG accounting. Carbon accounting (or GHG accounting) is essentially a framework of methods to measure and track how much greenhouse gas an organization emits. It can also be used to track actions to reduce emissions in sectors such as forestry or renewable energy. Corporations, cities and other groups use these techniques to fight climate change.

Burnbrae Farms' environmental, social, and governance (ESG) strategy and objectives are informed by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Although Burnbrae hasn't developed a separate SDG framework, its initiatives speak for themselves in the advancement of several key objectives. "Researching and deploying world-class, best practices across our system is the ongoing, never-ending work that we do," explains Margaret Hudson, Burnbrae Farms president and CEO. "Those areas of focus reflect who we are and what we do."

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN members in 2015, created 17 world sustainable development goals (SDGs). Their aim? Peace and prosperity for our planet, while tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests. The UN goals highlight connections between the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development. With sustainability at the core, Burnbrae Farms has made significant inroads in all 17 SDGs.

**"Researching and deploying world-class practices across our system is the never-ending work that we do"**







## THE UN'S 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS







## FIVE PILLARS

As a purpose-driven organization, robust family values govern virtually every aspect of what Burnbrae has been doing for generations. Indeed, it feeds into how Burnbrae has helped shape the sustainability conversation in Canada's egg and agribusiness sectors for decades.

As longstanding stewards of natural and human resources, and as resolute advocates of animal welfare, Burnbrae is no stranger to corporate social responsibly (CSR). The company listens closely to consumers and special interest groups to understand people's preferences and concerns as they relate to food.

A decade ago, Burnbrae took its deepest CSR action yet. It identified five core areas – key pillars – where it could maximize positive outcomes through a comprehensive yet highly targeted approach to sustainability processes.

Since then, the company has analysed, audited and acted decisively to improve our natural environment, advance animal care, strengthen the health and wellbeing of Canadians, and provide safe nourishing food for all.



## ENVIRONMENT

### Burnbrae's desired outcome

Minimize environmental impact in poultry and processing operations by efficient use of resources, while preserving or enriching natural spaces

Burnbrae has invested heavily in renewable energy sources. Six years ago the company completed construction of the largest solar powered commercial layer hen farm in Canada in Woodstock, Ont. The farm, which has free range housing, shares surplus power with the adjoining Adanac farm. High efficiency motors, lighting and ventilation systems help lower the low carbon footprint of the facility. "You've got to have early adopters jumping in and providing the early movement to keep these technologies moving forward," Hudson explains. "We want to be part of that early adoption."

To further reduce its environmental impact, Burnbrae built its second solar field in Lyn. Burnbrae is engaged in other green initiatives including shoreline clean-ups, tree planting, battery recycling and elimination of e-waste. Furthermore, Burnbrae has slashed energy use at certain locations by using filtered air from the outside during colder months for refrigeration, retrofitting lighting with high efficiency bulbs, and by adding LED lights to its candling<sup>1</sup> operations.

6 CLEAN WATER  
AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND  
CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



**"We want to be part of  
that early adoption"**



<sup>1</sup>Candling is the process of using light to determine the quality of an egg.





Meanwhile, waste audits to improve recycling and cut landfill waste have borne fruit. Since 2016, **Burnbrae's rate of waste diversion from landfill has risen from 72% to 91%**

The company is also **conserving and managing 1,000 acres of wooded areas** in eastern Ontario in partnership with multiple environmental stewardship organizations. All told, the group's efforts to preserve natural resources have resulted in meaningful cuts in electricity, natural gas and water use.

Insofar as aligning with the UN's sustainability goals, Burnbrae's actions (under its Environment Pillar) cut across six areas. They include: clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; and life on land.

It is easy to see why. In 2021, Burnbrae conducted a water assessment at two processing facilities to explore technologies to beef up its water management and water conservation. In 2025, Burnbrae began a water conservation project in its further processing plant in Upton. This technology will reduce water use from 400 cubic metres per day to 40 when implemented. This all but eliminates waste water into the town sewage system.

Hudson, who has a degree in environmental science, has always had two passions. "One was to help carry on the family business and the other was to help address the world's environmental problems." She adds, "Clearly we are passionate about sustainability and do the things we do because we genuinely care. However, we also know that consumer sentiments are changing, and they will increasingly choose companies that are doing the right things for the right reasons."

Burnbrae also reclaims "grey water" for floor washing and has shifted from chemical cleaners to eco-friendly gels that eliminate water use. Burnbrae has also implemented systems to mitigate biochemical oxygen demand, or BOD (oxygen consumed by bacteria and other microorganisms as they decompose organic matter) from its wastewater at four of its facilities. Burnbrae stores and treats wastewater from its grading and farm operations in Lyn and uses it for irrigation as required on its hayfields – a shrewd irrigation approach that bolsters hay production, especially in drier years.

**9** INDUSTRY, INNOVATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



**10** REDUCED  
INEQUALITIES



**11** SUSTAINABLE CITIES  
AND COMMUNITIES





## SAFE NOURISHING FOOD

### Burnbrae's desired outcome

Offer safe and wholesome food, produced through an indisputable commitment to quality assurance

Burnbrae's food safety programs – which include quality assurance and food safety tracking – operate in accordance with Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points specifications and the Safe Food for Canadians Act. The goal? Becoming North America's leading practitioner of poultry and egg-related food safety. As such, Burnbrae has implemented a multi-year food safety strategy to improve its quality assurance programs. This includes:

- Robust environmental **monitoring programs**
- Food safety and quality management systems and **performance indicators**
- **Food safety training** for all employees
- Digital technology to **measure outcomes** and reduce complexity

Burnbrae's stated goal of providing safe, nourishing food dovetails with the UN's "zero hunger" objective. Indeed, in fiscal 2023 the company funded 15 organizations, donating more than \$184,000 through the Burnbrae Farms Foundation. It routinely donates one million-plus eggs and egg products to Canadian food banks and related community groups.

Burnbrae is moving closer to other important SDG goals. Namely, (1) contributing to the health of Canadian diets with eggs as a nutritious food source; (2) seeking out nutrient gaps in eggs and boosting nutritional quality; and (3) using as few ingredients as possible in processed egg products, including limiting the use of flavours, colours and preservatives.





## ANIMAL CARE

### Burnbrae's desired outcome

Our hens receive the best possible care, guided by science-based standards in a continuous improvement framework

Animal care is no small pillar of Burnbrae's SDG goals. Broadly, this aspect includes rigorous annual training of employees who work with poultry, and regular animal welfare assessments. The company's animal care program is coordinated by a National Animal Care Specialist while its Animal Welfare Working Group meets thrice annually to review care policies and procedures, and ensure companywide rigour. Burnbrae Farms is committed to continuous improvement of its poultry health, nutrition and biosecurity programs, with input from researchers, veterinarians and nutritionists. That said, Burnbrae invests heavily into research and education. It has supported University of Alberta's Poultry Innovation Partnership, the Burnbrae Farms Professorship at the University of Guelph, and renovations to the building of the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at Université Laval.



The company is currently on track in its areas of focus for animal care. Two vital initiatives include the delivery of enhanced national animal care programs, as well as moving away from conventional poultry housing towards improved systems such as enriched, free run, and free range housing by 2036. Indeed, the company leads the national pack in this area. Between 2016 and 2023, **Burnbrae effectively doubled its alternative housing from 27% of all housing to 52.68%** compared with a national average of 51.98%.





## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

### Burnbrae's desired outcome

To be an “employer of choice” with unparalleled culture, and a reputation for having a safe and healthy working environment where colleagues feel valued

In the area of health and wellbeing, Burnbrae's CSR efforts centre on **safe working environments for all** Burnbrae team members through health and safety programs, continuous training, internal audits and investments in processes and equipment aimed at injury prevention. All locations have a Joint Health and Safety Committee that meets regularly to discuss site specific issues and act on programs that ensure safe workspaces. In 2024, Burnbrae Farms won the Avetta Award for Canada's Safest Manufacturing Employer.

Insofar as aligning with the UN's sustainability goals, Burnbrae's actions under its Health and Wellbeing pillar cut across six areas with a particular emphasis on the UN's objectives of quality education, reduced inequalities, gender equality, and decent work and economic growth.

“We continuously work on improvements to protect our colleagues,” the company notes in a sustainability report. “We believe in creating an environment where everyone feels like they belong, and benefits from a diverse and inclusive workplace.”

As such, Burnbrae is committed to continuous improvement, including professional and personal development. Indeed, the company has invested heavily in recent years in employee training and skills-acquisition opportunities for staffers. It even established its own program of “Poultry and Egg School” to train all new employees in all departments and deepen their egg and egg industry knowledge.

“We've reinforced how important our family culture is to our business”

1 NO POVERTY



2 ZERO HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY





## COMMUNITY SPIRIT

### Burnbrae's desired outcome

Communities in which Burnbrae operates feel the impact of its charitable giving, colleague volunteerism, food assistance support, and leadership in agriculture literacy

Burnbrae's community spirit and charitable giving pillar has roots in the values of the Hudson family. Giving back to communities is something that all generations of Hudsons continue to do. The company supports many charities and local infrastructure projects.

And as a majority female-owned and operated company, the family running the business has been inspired by not just the men in prior generations, but also the women, many of whom were very active supporting their local communities.

With regard to aligning with the UN's sustainability goals, Burnbrae's actions under its Community Spirit pillar address four UN targets including, zero hunger, clean water and sanitation, life below water, and partnerships for the goals – the latter referring to the need for the nonhegemonic and fair cross-sector and cross-country collaborations.



Insofar as community spirit is concerned, Burnbrae is arguably a paragon of virtue. Through its philanthropic partnerships and employee engagement, the company has left an indelible mark on the communities in which it works. Burnbrae routinely donates more than a million eggs and egg-based products to national food-insecure organizations every year.

As forest fires ravaged regions of Canada in 2023, Burnbrae rallied to supply several thousands of kilograms of food for relief efforts. And the company continues to make sterling efforts to protect natural spaces and farmland. Employees routinely participate in shoreline and roadside cleanups, and tree-planting initiatives through Burnbrae's community investment budgets.

Beyond its generous corporate donations and sponsorships, Burnbrae empowers its employees through community volunteering programs in which workers can dedicate their time to charitable causes. The goal? To encourage purposeful volunteerism in the communities its employees call home. Upon volunteering for at least 20 hours during Burnbrae's fiscal year, an eligible charitable nonprofit receives a \$200 grant.

Whether it is figuring out new ways to measure and eliminate its carbon sources, educate and empower its workers, protect our forests and waterways or just keep Canadians nourished, Burnbrae is all-in in terms of operating sustainably and ethically. In other words, in spite of its considerable size, Burnbrae Farms is still very much a family enterprise whose family values remain intrinsic to its trading ethos.

Says Hudson, "We've reinforced how important our family culture is to our business, and how important our family interactions are to our colleagues who have been with our company a long time. They love working for a business with a family behind it."

