

Advancing Sustainability in the Food Value Chain

Insights from Engaging Industry Associations to Advance ESG Practices

Prepared for

City of Vancouver

Prepared by

Coro Strandberg
Strandberg Consulting

March 2026

Participating Food Value Chain Industry Associations

- BC Potato & Vegetable Growers Association
- Canadian Produce Marketing Association
- Canadian College & University Food Service Association
- Destination Vancouver
- BC Food & Beverage



Advancing Sustainability in the Food Value Chain

Introduction

Reducing food waste is an important environmental, economic, and social priority across the food system. Addressing this challenge requires coordinated action across the food value chain and collaboration among the organizations that influence food sector practices.

Because food waste and broader sustainability challenges are shaped by interconnected decisions across the value chain, industry associations, representing different parts of the food system, have an important role to play in strengthening alignment and enabling more coordinated action.

To explore this opportunity, the City of Vancouver initiated a pilot project to engage food sector associations in a structured sustainability assessment and peer-learning process, using the Canadian Standards Association (CSA Group) [ESG Guidance for Associations \(CSA SPE #116\)](#) – a benchmark tool used by many associations across Canada.

This report summarizes the results of the pilot and presents 20 recommendations for industry associations, municipalities, and other stakeholders to strengthen collaboration and advance sustainability across the food value chain.

Top Ten Takeaways

The following summarizes the key insights and lessons learned from the pilot project.

Association-Level Insights

1. Participating associations are advancing on sustainability, demonstrating a number of best practices, and value the CSA SPE #116 tool for identifying gaps, structuring efforts and strengthening their approach. Assessment results indicate that four associations achieved a pre-bronze level and one achieved a silver level, with scores ranging from 20% to 54%¹.
2. The food value chain is fragmented with limited mechanisms connecting actors across the system; when associations come together in value chain collaborations, they gain insight into upstream and downstream expectations, shared sustainability pressures, and opportunities for alignment across the value chain.
3. Associations vary significantly in their capacity to engage on sustainability, with differences in staff resources, organizational priorities, and ESG maturity; as a result, outside support and convening can play an important role in enabling participation and progress.
4. Tailored association tools like SPE #116 create a common platform for value chain associations to learn and advance collectively.

¹ CSA SPE #116 rating scale: 39–53% (bronze); 54–69% (silver); 70–84% (gold); 85–100% (platinum).

System-Level Insights

5. Rising sustainability expectations from retailers, banks, and institutional buyers are anticipated to cascade through the food supply chain, affecting processors, suppliers, and growers.
6. Sustainability standards, benchmarking frameworks and credible verification are becoming increasingly important for demonstrating sustainability performance to buyers, regulators, financial institutions, and consumers.
7. Current economic and geopolitical pressures influence the ability of organizations to prioritize sustainability initiatives.
8. Positioning sustainability as part of a broader approach to economic sustainability, local sourcing, risk management and supply chain security and resilience can make it more relevant to members and stakeholders and increase uptake.
9. Associations across the food value chain share exposure to climate and supply-chain risks, creating opportunities for collaboration to better understand and address these risks collectively.
10. Improving coordination and information sharing across the food value chain could help address shared system-level sustainability challenges – such as food waste – that no single part of the system can solve alone.

Summary of Recommendations

Participating Associations

1. Use SPE #116 to establish a baseline and inform strategy
2. Share SPE #116 experience with peer associations
3. Continue collaboration and knowledge-sharing
4. Frame sustainability using risk and resilience language
5. Assess and address ESG risks and opportunities
6. Advance shared standards and benchmarking
7. Articulate and embed purpose

City of Vancouver

8. Continue convening value chain actors
9. Strengthen system-level understanding of food waste
10. Collaborate with associations as implementation partners
11. Resource and compensate industry association participation

Local and Regional Governments

12. Engage associations as implementation partners
13. Use SPE #116 to support industry engagement

Other Food Sector Associations

14. Broaden value chain representation
15. Strengthen coordination across commodity groups

CSA Group

16. Share lessons from the pilot
17. Support cross-sector risk and resilience work
18. Develop guidance for value chain collaboration
19. Support harmonized standards and benchmarking
20. Standardize approaches to measuring food loss and waste

Background and Project Context

Food waste is a significant environmental, social, and economic issue across the food system. In Vancouver, for example, an estimated 10,000 tonnes of edible food valued at \$77.6 million (2022) are discarded annually by businesses and institutions — a figure that does not include composted edible food and likely understates current losses given rising food costs. This represents not only environmental impact, but also substantial lost economic value and inefficiencies across the food supply chain.

Under its Zero Waste 2040 Strategic Plan, the City has committed to enabling and growing the systems, capacity, innovation, and incentives necessary to support businesses in reducing waste. While the City has piloted work with individual businesses through initiatives such as the [Circular Food Innovation Lab](#), achieving meaningful, system-level change requires engaging industry associations as trusted intermediaries to mobilize businesses across the food value chain.

Industry associations play a critical role in shaping sector practices. They convene businesses, facilitate collaboration across the sector, provide guidance and tools to their members, and influence industry norms through standards, training, and shared learning. Engaging associations enables change at the sector and supply chain level, rather than through isolated business initiatives. Only by engaging whole sectors and coordinating action across the food system value chain can lasting sustainability outcomes – including reductions in food waste – be achieved.

To harness the collective power of food value chain associations to drive sector-wide change, the City of Vancouver initiated a pilot project to engage food sector associations and strengthen their capacity to advance sustainability among their members. The City commissioned Strandberg Consulting, an advisory firm specializing in ESG strategy and association ESG engagement, to facilitate the project and support participating associations.

The CSA Group’s [Environmental, Social, and Governance \(ESG\) and Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\) Guidance for Associations](#) (CSA SPE #116) was selected as the framework for the work. Designed specifically for industry and professional associations, the guide provides a roadmap and self-assessment tool to benchmark ESG practices, identify gaps, and advance continuous improvement within associations.

Advancing ESG through this framework offers strategic benefits to associations and their members. These include managing sector-wide risks and building resilience; strengthening reputation and social license; meeting evolving expectations from retailers, institutional

CSA SPE #116: ESG Guidance for Associations

CSA SPE #116 is a guidance framework developed by the CSA Group to help industry and professional associations strengthen ESG leadership.

It provides:

- Step-by-step ideas for starting or advancing an industry ESG program
- A performance rating and self-assessment tool to benchmark and validate association ESG practices
- A comprehensive set of ESG practices associations can pursue to strengthen member sustainability

It has been used by many associations as a tool to identify gaps and set priorities to help their members enhance their social and environmental performance and address their ESG risks.

buyers, and regulators; influencing policy and regulatory development; supporting members through shared tools and capacity building; enhancing competitiveness and innovation; and maintaining relevance by reinforcing the association’s value proposition.

Five associations representing different segments of the food value chain were convened to participate in the assessment and peer-learning process. This cohort approach enabled associations to compare results, share insights, and explore collaborative opportunities to advance sustainability across the food sector.

Approach

The approach combined a structured self-assessment using CSA SPE #116 with facilitated cohort discussions.

Rationale for a Value Chain Cohort

Food waste and broader sustainability challenges arise from interconnected decisions across production, processing, distribution, food service, tourism, retail, and marketing. Addressing these issues requires coordination across the supply chain rather than isolated action within individual subsectors.

To reflect this interdependence, the pilot was designed to engage associations from across the food value chain in a shared cohort, enabling a system-level perspective on risks, pressures, and opportunities that no single association or company could fully see on its own.

The cohort model enabled peer learning across growers, processors, food service providers, tourism, and marketing organizations. By comparing assessment results and sharing practices, associations gained insight into upstream and downstream expectations, emerging ESG requirements, and opportunities for alignment on standards, tools, and member supports.

Recruitment and Participation

The City of Vancouver identified potential associations representing key segments of the food value chain and, in collaboration with Strandberg Consulting, conducted targeted outreach outlining the project’s objectives and value proposition. Five associations agreed to participate:

- BC Potato & Vegetable Growers Association
- Canadian Produce Marketing Association
- Canadian College & University Food Service Association
- Destination Vancouver

Project Facilitator

Coro Strandberg
President, [Strandberg Consulting](#)

Nationally recognized strategist specializing in ESG/sustainability, social purpose, industry association sustainability engagement, and sustainability governance for boards.

Advisor to the Federal Office of the Auditor General’s Commissioner for Environment and Sustainable Development.

Faculty member for Governance Professionals of Canada and The Directors College providing education on sustainability governance.

Co-author of the CSA Group’s *ESG and SDG Guidance for Associations (CSA SPE #116)* used in this pilot project.

- BC Food & Beverage

Each association received individualized support to complete the CSA SPE #116 self-assessment. Participants were then convened in three facilitated cohort sessions to review findings, share insights, and explore collaborative opportunities and next steps.

Participation in the cohort meetings varied across the three sessions. One association was represented by a new staff member at the final meeting who attended as an observer.

Assessment Findings: Cross-Association Themes

An analysis of the assessment results reveals that associations are at an early to intermediate stage of ESG implementation, with varying levels of maturity among organizations. They share a number of common strengths and gaps.

Common Strengths

Strong member engagement and knowledge-sharing platforms

Associations maintain well-established channels for engaging members and sharing knowledge, including conferences, newsletters, webinars, and committees. These platforms provide effective mechanisms for sharing sustainability information, promoting industry dialogue, and raising awareness of ESG issues across their memberships.

Sector collaboration and sustainability initiatives

Many associations participate in multi-stakeholder initiatives involving government, research institutions, financial actors, and peer associations. These collaborations support industry initiatives on issues such as sustainable packaging, climate resilience, food loss and waste, and sustainable tourism.

Common Gaps

Limited formal ESG governance structures

Most associations do not yet have formal ESG strategies, board ESG oversight structures, or explicit integration of sustainability into mission statements or strategic plans.

Limited use of targets, metrics, and reporting

While some measurement initiatives are underway, few associations have established clear sector-level sustainability targets or systems to measure and report member ESG progress.

Limited integration into association operations

Sustainability considerations are not yet consistently embedded in internal operational practices such as procurement policies, staff training, sustainable event management practices, etc.

Limited articulation of organizational or sector purpose

In several cases, sustainability activity is not yet anchored in a clearly defined organizational or sector purpose that guides long-term strategy and impact. ESG initiatives are framed around specific issues or programs rather than the association's and sector's overarching purpose (reason to exist) and societal contribution.

Structural Challenges

Associations identified several structural factors affecting the pace of ESG integration:

- limited staff and financial resources within associations
- competing priorities across diverse membership bases
- varying levels of sustainability maturity across their membership

As a result, many associations are currently focused on building awareness, sharing knowledge, and supporting member collaboration before advancing more formal ESG programs.

These findings provide context for the value chain insights and recommendations that emerged from the cohort discussions.

Learning from the Cohort Discussions

In addition to the assessment findings, participants identified several lessons through the pilot process, including insights from the cohort discussions and reflections on the use of the CSA SPE #116 framework.

Peer Insights

Three facilitated meetings were held in July 2025, September 2025, and March 2026 with participating associations to discuss the results of the SPE #116 assessments, identify commonalities and challenges, and determine implications. The following insights emerged from these discussions.

- **Helpful Tool:** Associations found the tool helpful for identifying ESG strengths and gaps.
- **Partial Integration:** Sustainability practices are already underway but often not embedded in governance or mission statements.
- **Rising ESG Expectations:** Retailers, banks, and institutional buyers are increasing ESG expectations that will cascade through the supply chain.
- **Association Role:** Associations can play an important role in educating and preparing members for these expectations.
- **Standards Clarity:** There is a need for clearer sustainability standards and benchmarking approaches across the supply chain.
- **Verification Needs:** Credible verification of sustainability claims is becoming more important, particularly in light of evolving regulations.
- **Resource Constraints:** Financial pressures on restaurants and small businesses can limit the ability to prioritize sustainability initiatives.
- **Shifting Priorities:** Sustainability priorities are evolving in response to economic, geopolitical, and regulatory pressures, with organizations balancing ESG goals against immediate operational challenges and responding to increasing scrutiny of environmental claims.
- **Resilience and Risk Framing:** Framing sustainability conversations in terms of risk management and supply chain security, localization and resilience could enhance take-up among members and across the value chain.

- **Shared ESG Risks:** Continued collaboration across associations could help address shared ESG challenges such as food waste and climate risks.

Benefits Identified by Associations

Participating associations identified several benefits arising from both the application of the CSA SPE #116 framework and the value-chain cohort approach used in the project.

Benefits of the CSA SPE #116 Tool

- **Identifying Strengths, Gaps, and Opportunities for Improvement**
Participants noted that the assessment process helped associations better understand their current sustainability practices and identify areas for improvement. The tool provided a structured way to surface both strengths and gaps across governance, operations, member engagement, and sector leadership. In some cases, associations recognized that sustainability-related work was already underway but not always formally articulated or strategically coordinated.
- **Providing a Practical Framework for ESG Strategy**
Several participants described SPE #116 as a helpful guide for associations navigating ESG. The framework offered a structured methodology to organize existing initiatives, assess progress, and identify potential next steps. For associations currently updating strategies or exploring how to integrate sustainability more systematically into their work, the tool served as a useful reference point for strategic planning.
- **Encouraging Integration of Sustainability into Governance and Organizational Mandates**
The assessment process prompted reflection on how sustainability is embedded within association governance and leadership structures. Some associations noted that sustainability was not explicitly referenced in their constitution, mission, or strategic documents, despite members being actively engaged in sustainability initiatives. The SPE #116 framework encouraged consideration of how sustainability could be more formally incorporated into governance structures and organizational mandates.
- **Creating a Common Framework for Sector Dialogue**
Participants observed that SPE #116 provided a shared framework and language for discussing sustainability across associations and sectors. This common reference point made it easier to compare practices, discuss emerging expectations, and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Benefits of the Value Chain Cohort Approach

- **Broadens Understanding Across the Food Value Chain**
Engaging with associations from different parts of the food system provided perspectives that participants do not typically encounter in their day-to-day work. Hearing from associations representing producers and processors, and tourism, distribution, retail, and institutional food service organizations helped participants better understand the differing challenges and priorities across the value chain and highlighted the interconnected nature of sustainability issues across the sector.

- Identifies Shared Pressures and Emerging Expectations**

Discussions revealed that sustainability expectations are increasingly shaped by actors across the value chain, including retailers, banks, institutional buyers, and consumers. These expectations are beginning to cascade through the supply chain, influencing processors, food manufacturers, and ultimately growers and producers. The cohort discussions helped participants better understand how these pressures are evolving.
- Surfaces System-Level Challenges**

Participants noted that issues such as food waste, supply chain resilience, and sustainability verification cannot be addressed within individual subsectors alone. The value chain discussions highlighted how decisions in one part of the system affect other actors upstream and downstream, reinforcing the importance of coordination across the sector.
- Strengthens Collaboration Across Associations**

Participants expressed strong appreciation for the opportunity to engage with peer associations. The exchange of experiences and perspectives was seen as valuable and relatively rare across the sector. Several participants noted that continued collaboration could help address shared priorities such as supply chain resilience, sustainability standards, and food waste reduction.
- Reveals Capacity Gaps and Opportunities**

It was noted that many agricultural commodity associations are relatively small and operate with limited (or no) staff and financial resources, which can constrain their ability to advance sustainability. This has implications for their ability to respond to rising expectations in a coordinated way. The BC Agriculture Council, as an umbrella organization representing multiple commodity groups, was identified as a potential coordinating body that could play a stronger role in supporting ESG collaboration, aligning efforts, and building shared ESG capacity across agricultural associations.

Implications for Sustainability Across the Food Value Chain

Taken together, the assessment findings and cohort discussions highlight several dynamics shaping the evolution of sustainability across the food value chain.

Emerging ESG expectations across the supply chain

- Increasing ESG requirements of retailers and banks
- Sustainability embedment in procurement by institutional food services
- Trickle-down expectations for growers, farmers, and packaging and logistics providers

Growing importance of credible sustainability assurance

- Buyers increasingly seeking evidence to substantiate sustainability claims
- Greater attention to verification, benchmarking, and credible environmental reporting
- Increasing scrutiny of sustainability claims as regulatory expectations evolve and ESG claims face greater examination in North America

Opportunities for sector-wide alignment on standards and common industry language

- Need for clearer sustainability standards and approaches that can be understood across the value chain
- Interest in benchmarking frameworks that allow growers and companies to compare performance and demonstrate progress
- Recognition that sustainability priorities differ across commodities and regions, requiring flexibility within common frameworks

Economic and operational pressures slowing sustainability adoption

- Rising food costs and thin margins in parts of the sector, such as restaurants, affecting the ability to prioritize sustainability
- Operational realities influencing how sustainability considerations are balanced with cost and supply constraints
- Economic sustainability is a critical dimension of overall sustainability, with financial viability, cost management, and value distribution across the supply chain shaping the pace and scale of adoption

Local sourcing and resilience emerging as important sustainability considerations

- Local procurement and farm-to-table messaging becoming stronger purchasing drivers in parts of the sector reflecting consumer, geopolitical and supply security trends
- Increasing recognition that climate risks, biodiversity loss, and agricultural conditions affect long-term supply stability
- Sustainability may gain traction when framed as strategies to manage supply chain risk and strengthen resilience

Improved communication and coordination across the value chain

- Sustainability initiatives are underway across different parts of the sector but are not always well communicated or coordinated
- At present, there is no consistent mechanism or platform connecting actors across the value chain, resulting in fragmented efforts and missed opportunities for alignment and collective impact
- Food loss and waste reflects system-wide interdependencies across the value chain, influenced by factors such as production, packaging and logistics, and requires coordinated action and a clear understanding of roles and upstream–downstream impacts

Recommendations

The pilot generated insights that inform actions for industry associations, municipalities, and standards organizations to advance sustainability across the food value chain.

Recommendations for Participating Associations

While these recommendations are based on insights from participating associations, they may also be applicable to other industry associations looking to strengthen and advance their sustainability practices.

1. Use SPE #116 to establish a baseline and inform strategy

Associations can use the SPE #116 assessment to establish a baseline of their current sustainability practices, identify strengths and gaps, and inform the development or enhancement of their sustainability strategies. This can support more intentional prioritization of actions, including setting targets and tracking progress over time, and strengthening practices across key areas of the assessment.

2. Share SPE #116 experience with peer associations

Participants noted that relatively few associations in their sector are aware of the CSA SPE #116 guidance document. Sharing lessons from this pilot with peer associations could help stimulate broader discussion on how associations can advance sustainability and respond to emerging expectations across the sector.

3. Continue collaboration and knowledge-sharing across associations

Participants emphasized the value of engaging with associations from different parts of the food value chain. Continued collaboration could support peer learning, improve understanding of sustainability pressures across the supply chain, and enable more coordinated action on shared challenges such as food waste and supply chain resilience.

4. Frame sustainability discussions using local, risk and resilience language

Participants observed that framing sustainability in terms of local sourcing, risk management, supply chain security and resilience, and long-term business continuity may resonate more strongly with members than narratives focused solely on sustainability outcomes. Associations can play an important role in communicating sustainability in ways that align with the operational, economic and market realities faced by their members.

5. Assess and address ESG risks and opportunities at the sector level

Associations could strengthen their support to members by identifying and addressing key ESG risks and opportunities affecting their sector, including climate change, supply chain disruptions, geopolitical dynamics and evolving expectations from retailers, banks, institutional buyers, and consumers. A more structured understanding of these factors can help associations anticipate emerging pressures and innovation opportunities, inform member guidance, support more coordinated responses across the value chain, and help their members become more resilient and build proactive capacity to respond to future risks and disruptions.

6. Advance the use of shared sustainability standards and benchmarking approaches

Associations could support their members by promoting the use of sustainability standards and benchmarking frameworks, and where appropriate, by collaborating to develop shared approaches. Greater alignment on standards can help members demonstrate performance to buyers, regulators, and financial institutions, while also supporting more consistent practices and communication across the value chain.

7. Articulate and embed a clear organizational or sector purpose

Associations could strengthen their impact by defining a clear organizational or sector purpose that reflects their role and contribution to society. A well-articulated purpose can help guide long-term strategy, support more agile decision-making in times of uncertainty, and enhance the association's relevance to members and the broader community. It can also provide a unifying framework to connect sustainability initiatives across programs and activities.

Recommendations for the City of Vancouver

While this report was commissioned by the City of Vancouver, these recommendations may also be relevant to other municipalities seeking to initiate or advance similar actions.

8. Continue convening actors across the food value chain to address shared sustainability challenges such as food waste

Participants encouraged the City of Vancouver to continue acting as a convener of actors across the food system to support dialogue, collaboration, and coordinated action on sustainability challenges that span the value chain, including food waste. The City could establish ongoing mechanisms (e.g. cohorts, working groups, or platform) to build sustained connections across the value chain.

9. Strengthen system-level understanding of food waste across the food supply chain

The City could play a role in improving understanding of food waste levels, patterns and drivers across the food system, helping identify opportunities for coordinated action and targeted interventions.

10. Collaborate with industry associations as implementation partners

Industry associations can serve as effective intermediaries between municipalities and businesses. By working through associations, the City can disseminate guidance, tools, and best practices more efficiently and accelerate adoption of sustainability practices across the food value chain.

11. Resource and compensate industry association participation

To enable meaningful and sustained engagement, the City should recognize the capacity constraints of industry associations, which often operate with lean teams and budgets. Where associations are expected to contribute time, expertise, and coordination support, the City should consider allocating funding or other forms of compensation. Resourcing participation will help ensure consistent engagement, strengthen the quality of input, and support the successful implementation of initiatives across the food value chain.

Recommendations for Local and Regional Governments

12. Engage industry associations across the value chain as sustainability implementation partners

Local and regional governments can advance their sustainability objectives by engaging industry associations as intermediaries to mobilize businesses. Convening cohorts of associations across the full value chain can support coordinated action on shared challenges such as climate, circularity, food waste and security, resilience and affordability. Advancing this work requires engagement with provincial and national associations. As this may be beyond the reach of

individual municipalities, coordination across governments is needed, including through organizations such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

13. Use tools such as CSA SPE #116 to advance sustainability in business and initiate industry engagement

Local and regional governments can use tools such as CSA SPE #116 to initiate engagement with industry associations, providing a readily accessible resource that associations can use to benchmark their sustainability practices and advance them. Governments can also simply disseminate SPE #116 to associations in their networks to support broader awareness, uptake, alignment, and progress on sustainability across sectors. The more industry associations and their members move forward on sustainability, the greater the impact local and regional governments can achieve on priorities that depend on action from business.

Recommendations for Other Food Sector Associations

14. Broaden representation across the food value chain in future cohorts

Future initiatives could benefit from engaging a broader range of industry associations and organizations across the food value chain, including stronger representation from retail and grocery, food service and culinary organizations, small-scale and specialty food processors, diverse commodity groups, national and export-oriented associations, and hospitality organizations. Expanding participation could strengthen system-level understanding, surface a wider range of perspectives, and enhance opportunities for coordination and alignment across the sector.

15. Strengthen coordination and capacity across commodity groups

As an umbrella organization representing a broad range of commodity groups, the BC Agriculture Council could explore opportunities to support greater ESG alignment and collaboration across the agricultural sector. This could include facilitating knowledge-sharing, supporting joint initiatives on shared priorities such as climate risk, food waste, and sustainability verification, and helping smaller associations access tools, resources, and guidance. A more coordinated approach could strengthen the sector's ability to respond to evolving ESG expectations from buyers, regulators, and financial institutions.

Recommendations for CSA Group

16. Share lessons from this pilot with other industry associations

CSA Group could help disseminate insights from this pilot to other industry associations to stimulate broader discussion on sustainability practices, approaches and opportunities across sectors. Sharing findings and lessons from this pilot, including benchmarking or visual summaries of how associations responded to the assessment, could foster greater learning among participants and encourage other associations to explore the use of the SPE #116 guidance and identify opportunities for collaboration across sectors. CSA Group could also consider developing a simplified "entry point" or starter resource for associations with limited capacity to help them begin the conversation and build readiness before engaging with the full SPE #116 framework.

17. Support a cross-sector study on risk and resilience across the food value chain

CSA Group could support the development of a shared study and engagement process across food sector associations examining ESG risks and opportunities affecting the sector. Many of these risks are shared across the value chain but experienced differently by each actor. Such work could help associations and their members better understand these interdependencies, identify opportunities for coordinated resilience strategies, and articulate the value proposition for collaboration across traditionally siloed groups. It could also inform approaches to overcoming methodological and behavioural barriers to cross-sector collaboration and create a model that other associations could replicate.

18. Develop and pilot guidance for establishing value chain sustainability collaborations

CSA Group could support continued engagement of the associations participating in this pilot, using the cohort as a foundation to explore and refine approaches to value chain collaboration. Insights from this work could inform the development of guidance to help other associations establish and participate in value chain collaborations aimed at advancing sustainability, creating a model that can be adapted and replicated across sectors.

19. Support the development of harmonized standards and benchmarking approaches

CSA Group could support interested associations in developing sustainability standards, benchmarking frameworks, or guidance that enable greater alignment across diverse industry sectors and commodity groups. Advancing harmonized approaches can help create a common framework for sustainability practices and reporting, allowing associations and their members to communicate and demonstrate performance more consistently across the value chain.

20. Support standardized approaches to measuring food loss and waste

CSA Group could continue to support the development and adoption of standardized approaches for measuring food loss and waste across the food value chain, building on existing standards work underway. Consistent terminology, measurement, and benchmarking could help associations and their members better understand where losses occur and identify opportunities for coordinated action.

Conclusion

This pilot project demonstrated the value of engaging industry associations in advancing sustainability across the food value chain. The CSA SPE #116 framework provided participating associations with a structured way to reflect on their ESG practices, identify strengths and gaps, and consider how sustainability can be more fully integrated into governance, strategy, and member engagement.

The cohort discussions provided an opportunity for associations representing different parts of the food system to exchange perspectives and better understand how sustainability expectations are evolving across the value chain. These conversations highlighted the growing importance of credible and standardized sustainability practices, the influence of buyers and financial institutions on ESG expectations, and the operational, economic, and market pressures associations and their members are currently navigating.

Participants also noted the value of learning from other associations across the food system. Strengthening communication and collaboration across the value chain may help associations and their members respond more effectively to emerging sustainability expectations and shared challenges such as food waste and supply chain resilience.

The City of Vancouver's support for this pilot created an opportunity to explore how industry associations can contribute to advancing sustainability across the food value chain in ways that may be applicable more broadly.

The insights from this pilot contribute to a growing understanding of how industry associations can advance sustainability across the food sector and provide a foundation for continued collaboration and learning across the value chain, including on system-level challenges such as food waste.

Looking beyond the food sector, this work highlights the potential for tools such as CSA SPE #116 to serve as a common framework for industry associations across sectors to benchmark practices, align approaches, and strengthen the credibility of their sustainability efforts. As expectations for transparency, verification, and standardized practices continue to evolve, shared frameworks can support greater coordination across value chains and enable associations to work collectively to address complex, system-level challenges and contribute to more sustainable and resilient systems, benefiting both the industries they represent and broader society.

Acknowledgements

This project was initiated through the leadership and vision of Erin Nichols, former Senior Project Manager at the City of Vancouver, who helped conceive and launch the pilot engaging industry associations to advance sustainability across the food value chain.

The insights presented in this report were informed by the participation and contributions of industry associations representing different segments of the food value chain. Their willingness to share experiences, reflect on current practices, and engage in collaborative discussions provided valuable perspectives on how sustainability expectations are evolving across the sector.

Participating associations and representatives included:

Leisa Yee – BC Potato & Vegetable Growers Association

Jennifer Winning – BC Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (observer, final meeting)

Daniel Duguay – Canadian Produce Marketing Association

Dr. Colin Moore – Canadian College & University Food Service Association

Gwendal Castellan – Destination Vancouver

James Donaldson – BC Food & Beverage

Alissa Hutton – BC Food & Beverage