



INTERNATIONAL PANEL

7 May 2021

Nicola Dixon, Executive Director, General Mills Foundation

Full speech

1) **Looking back at 2020, what are the most important lessons learned, challenges and solutions that helped your company to face this unexpected year?**

Good morning and good afternoon again everyone. Unfortunately, COVID-19 is still very much impacting communities in regions around the globe. And so we offer these reflections as some of the lessons learned and observations so far. It was wonderful hearing from these other leaders. We are fortunate at General Mills to partner with The Global FoodBanking Network, with FEBA, Feeding America and Charities Aid Foundation, so my team and I have the honour of working with these other panellists throughout the year, which is something we are so grateful for.

I will offer a perspective from the combined vantagepoint of our company, General Mills, as a multinational food company, not just our foundation. In addition to North America we also operate and provide food to families across Europe, Asia, Australia, Latin America, under 100 different brands. So, if you don't know the name General Mills, you might know it as Latina Fresh pastas in Australia, or Wanchai Ferry dumplings in China, you may know our Betty Crocker products, our Nature Valley grain bars, or our cereal brands. So we are what they call in food a "house of brands". I'll offer a few thoughts as a company very committed to global social impact - as well as from the perspective of our philanthropy and charitable giving as well.



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I will begin by saying that we have been incredibly humbled by and in awe of the incredible COVID-19 response from community serving organizations (charities/NGOs/civil society organizational) around the world, as well as by our employees... the levels of ingenuity, commitment, compassion and strategic collaboration have been extraordinary. If anybody ever thought that the civil society sector, the charitable sector, food bank sector, wasn't as innovative as the for-profit or private sector, we'd have to say we've got news for you! We have seen amazing work every day that really put things into perspective, and it has been just incredible to see.

From a total company perspective, as we were first monitoring the emerging virus now known as COVID-19 - helped in part from the vantagepoint of our businesses in China - we fairly quickly gained an understanding of the potential magnitude, scope, and duration of this pandemic. So we were quite clear-eyed early on about the challenge ahead, which in turn enabled us to be highly focused, recognising our critical role and opportunity to fully activate our purpose of making food the world loves, and now needs, during this time of global crisis.

To rise to that challenge, one of the things that was crucial has been focusing on the fundamentals, which for us is anchoring on people and food. We knew it would be critical that we continued to ensure our 38,000 employees around the globe who enable us to make food every day in all these countries remained safe and healthy. This is always a top priority for us, but we recognised that the pandemic would be asking so much more of us.. we couldn't nourish the world if our people weren't safe and healthy. So, that principle was established and remained as job number one.

Our employee response has been incredible. And this was despite the enormous disruption going on in the communities where our employees live, sometimes in their own households. Our employees were and are what has enabled us to operate in ways we never have before to meet the unprecedented global demand for food.

In terms of our charitable response, while some of us that work in the philanthropy and global impact group may be a little biased towards community and NGO partners, we do recognise that the biggest lever we have as a multinational food company to nourish the world is by making food - how we support people's lives every day through our products. Yet we also know and value the additional role that a charitable response can play. And so, I'll just share a little bit about what that looked like for General Mills during COVID.

Through our giving we were able to go beyond our usual philanthropy to be able to provide about USD 9 million dollars in charitable grants specific to the COVID response, with a focus on emergency food access across our key global regions. We felt it was really critical that food bank networks and others on the front-line addressing hunger had resources that would enable them to quickly pivot and adapt - to stand up new programmes, in some cases entirely



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new operating models, very quickly. And we couldn't expect them to do that if we weren't all prepared as a funders community to help create an enabling environment for them to do that.

Meanwhile on the company side there were also some innovative responses to the crisis. We stood up manufacture to donate schemes in a couple of markets by taking quick lessons from our colleagues in Australia and replicating produce-to-donate in the United States. We recognised that at no other point in time would we have reduced demand on our manufacturing lines that normally produce food for schools and restaurants (that were now closed), so we were able to take advantage of those same production lines to make millions more wholegrain baked goods to donate and help meet the nutritional needs of at-risk youth who were no longer gaining access to a daily school meal. The General Mills response in terms of food donations enabled about 17 million additional meals during the 2020 proportion of COVID. I'm looking forward to getting our updated tally for the last six months quite soon, so that number will grow.

And finally, I'll underscore that General Mills COVID response has encompassed employees in every area of our company. For example, beyond our food manufacturing and philanthropy, we also coordinated with local public health officials around our world headquarters as well as our locations worldwide, to host onsite vaccination clinics, to keep employees and their communities safe.

2) **What are the key aspects or elements that you see in the future of your company?**

General Mills is highly focused on encouraging and supporting the broad adoption by farmers of regenerative agricultural principles on farms all over the world. I think you're going to see us engaging even more around this area because of the enormous benefits regenerative agricultural principles and practices bring to both people and planet.

So much of this conference dialogue and the UN Food Systems Summit coming up later this year, are centred on how we can collectively balance the mutually grand challenges of feeding more people in the world and the climate crisis as more than ever there is broad and growing awareness that these are absolutely critical years for urgent large-scale action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. So we need solutions that as our grand in impact as the challenges before us, and very fortunate for all of us, regenerative agriculture is actually one of those powerful solutions.

3) **FEBA Annual Convention is a recognised UN Food Systems Independent Dialogue and this is a very precious occasion to ask you this question: what message would you like**



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to share as a contribution to the United Nations Food Systems Summit? So, what's the message you would like to share with the UN Food Systems Summit?

First I would echo some of what Jacques and Lisa mentioned about the importance of developing a unified vision and voice from the food banks sector, because food banks bring such a valuable vantage point and can play a strong strategic contributing role, given that food banks interact everyday with a multitude of partners from schools and governments and public authorities to the private sector and citizen volunteers. The UN Food Systems Summit would enormously benefit from elevating the food bank sector's insights regarding equitable food access, cross-sector collaboration models, and insights about local and regional organizations and strategies versus roles and needs at the national level. Food banks see and know where the gaps and weak links are in a regional food system, as well as the opportunities that others can't always get to, so there is just a wealth of insight that I think the Food Bank sector can offer.

I hope that through the UN Food Systems Summit we could also illuminate the opportunity to ensure that globally there is sufficient funding made available to food banks to enable their vital work to be even more integrated into local and regional food systems, while still enabling the food bank sector to maintain fully independent, because I believe that is key part of what enables the agility and adaptability we have seen from food banks.

Finally I would say for the UN Food Systems Summit, there's an opportunity we might contemplate to go beyond talking about creating a sustainable system, to rather to set our sights higher and together map out what it would look like to bring about a regenerative food system - one that cannot only help ensure communities are food secure and well nourished, but one that ensures the ecosystems and growers we all depend on for food can also flourish. So we have an opportunity to really shift and expand our thinking to the regenerative potential, and that's a powerful lens and opportunity as the UN Food Systems Summit gets further defined and designed.



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