

## Five Minutes with McDonald's former Chief Sustainability and Social Impact Officer

What are the non-negotiables of a strong supplier relationship? How does one of the world's most famous restaurant chains approach sustainability? And what sustainability challenges keep industry leaders up at night?

Bord Bia's Maureen Gahan recently put these questions to Beth Hart, former Chief Sustainability and Social Impact Officer at McDonald's. Read a summary of that conversation below and watch the full video interview [here](#).

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.



**You're originally from Northern Ireland but now living and working in Chicago for McDonald's. How did that journey happen?**

**Beth:** It's certainly a long way from growing up in Lurgan in County Armagh, Northern Ireland. I started my career on the graduate training scheme at Marks and Spencer's on Baker Street in London. I was surrounded by mentors and supporters and eventually worked through roles at Mars, Diageo, Safeway, and Sainsbury's. I joined the McDonald's UK and Ireland business seven years ago.

**If you were to look at the next 12-18 months, what challenges are going to be demanding your focus?**

**Beth:** Never has it been so important that the private and public sector and NGOs work in partnership to deliver resilient sourcing models. We need to make sure that farmers can earn a livelihood, and that McDonald's franchisees can earn a livelihood and have an impact in their communities.

**What are the big sustainability challenges facing McDonald's in terms of both environmental and social sustainability?**

**Beth:** Our challenge unquestionably is around carbon reduction and our environmental footprint. And a huge proportion of our environmental footprint is in our supply chain. That's why we work with really pioneering suppliers like our Irish suppliers.

**On that note, do you have any advice on how to spot and nurture supplier partnerships? And how do you ensure they're mutually beneficial?**

**Beth:** We stay very loyal to the suppliers we've already got. So it's critical that any new supplier genuinely brings something new, be that in product or in

innovation or a supplier that can help us solve a problem. And those problems aren't always just related to growth. They're often related to sustainability and social impact.

Once we've connected with the supplier, we invest heavily at all levels to get to know that supplier, to build a connection, to build a mutual understanding. When the connection is close and we really understand each other, that's where the magic happens.

### What success stories or initiatives are you most excited about right now?

#### Beth:

In many of the countries we operate in, farmers are under enormous pressure to ensure they can invest in the long term. So we've instigated a number of programs most recently in the U.S. For instance, as part of a huge regenerative agriculture programme, we've invested over \$200 million across 38 states to motivate farmers to explore and convert to regenerative practices.

Make no mistake, what we're instigating in the US, we've learned from other countries around the world. The solution to resilient supply chains is different in each nation. However, some of the core guiding principles are universal.

**That 200 million investment is a very large figure. I don't know if that's keeping you awake at night, but what other challenges are top of mind right now?**

**Beth:** You can never do it all. When you're in a role like mine that spans sustainability, human rights, community action, nutrition, and also sustainability reporting and legal compliance,



there is literally always something to do in some part of the world. So there's probably always a feeling of "are we doing enough?"

### What do you appreciate most from the partnership that McDonald's has with Bord Bia?

### relationship with McDonald's has contributed to your sustainability efforts?

**Beth:** Tracking greenhouse gas reduction strategies, soil health, biodiversity measures, water quality, and ensuring responsible animal medicine usage requires a multifactorial

**"Our relationship with Bord Bia has informed our thinking around sustainable food supply chains and regenerative agriculture. Not just for Ireland, but across our global supply chain system."**

**Beth:** We really treasure our relationship with Bord Bia. We have a relationship that has spanned COVID and Brexit. That was a pretty lethal combination of challenges to the food system at the time. During that period, we met frequently with the Bord Bia team and Irish government to ensure McDonald's complied with the law and whatever regulations were coming into force. All while ensuring we kept our supply chain and our businesses in Ireland thriving.

**And finally, in terms of sustainability, do you have any examples of how Bord Bia's**

approach to measuring what matters.

From that perspective, Bord Bia's Origin Green program is so respected by the McDonald's business. What sets the program apart is that it provides a decade of data on what matters at the farm level, which means we can get a genuine understanding of how farmers are progressing and the impact they're having on the ground.



**Want to dive deeper into this conversation? Watch the full video interview here.**