



Testimony of Ernie Meier

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**“Sustainability in the Livestock Sector: Environmental Gain and Economic Viability.”**

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**Introduction:**

Hello, my name is Ernie Meier, and I am the director of quality, U.S. supply chain, for **McDonald's USA**, and I am the current chair of the **U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Poultry & Eggs**, which I will refer to as “the Roundtable” or “US-RSPE” going forward.

**As a multistakeholder, independent, and nonprofit organization, the Roundtable was put together to represent the entire supply chains of U.S. poultry and egg products.** We are grateful for the invitation to speak with this subcommittee and share what we have learned facing the same issues you are —as a subcommittee and as representatives.

We currently have full-time membership commitments from almost 100 farms, organizations and individuals with national and international business reach that include more than 500 individual experts. They range across all disciplines of our business from those that directly care for birds to companies like McDonald's offering poultry and egg products to our end customers. Each of these individuals is plugged into the Roundtable and working on our shared goal to continuously improve the sustainability of U.S. poultry and egg supply chains.

**We believe the most successful sustainability tools are created by both those implementing them and those impacted by them.**

Every member has an equal vote in our structure to allow optimal collaboration and much of our work is open to public input. We are driven by a diverse group with varying resources and sizes.

For more than three years, farmers, integrators, researchers, grocery stores, animal health companies, environmental groups, welfare organizations, equipment companies and restaurant

chains such as McDonald's have been actively working to build the connections and tools we need to help to meet modern food system challenges and continuously improve our sustainability.

### **The U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Poultry & Eggs Approach**

Our approach to sustainability is pragmatic and holistic. Sustainability, like food safety, is good for everyone in the industry and our customers. We assess our impacts and benefits in relation to our poultry, our planet and its people. We work to identify solutions that are environmentally sound, socially responsible and economically viable.

#### **What's unique about the Roundtable is that we are a community and catalyst for progress.**

We are encouraging improvement by helping facilitate connections, provide access to expertise and remove barriers to advancement without ostracizing stakeholders.

The most effective sustainability strategies are based on sound data and comprehensive, repeatable measurement. **The Roundtable and its members have invested their own significant time and resources into developing the first-ever full supply chain sustainability framework for U.S. chicken, turkey and eggs (which I will refer to going forward as "the Framework").** We completed the development process in December last year and are in full speed to create the software tool to collect the data within this year.

### **Positive Outlook for Poultry & Egg Sectors**

And there's a lot of data to collect. The scale and importance of poultry in the diet of Americans and our world continues to grow. Poultry is the most consumed protein due to its accessibility to all cultures, affordability in relation to its nutrition and ease for at-home cooking and quick service-food. It's also a pillar of the food and agriculture industry, generating more than \$576 billion in annual economic impact and \$41.9 billion in taxes with more than 2 million workers employed by the poultry and egg supply chains<sup>1</sup>. (That's a lot of effort and people making your chicken nuggets and sandwiches possible.)

When we say, "billions served," we're not just talking about burgers. We're talking about serving our communities, customers, crew, farmers, franchisees and suppliers. What's shifted lately is the push up and down the supply chain. It's not enough for us to have fantastic sustainability programs at McDonald's and at our suppliers. We must have everything put together from the very beginning, from the feed for the birds and to delivery of our food across the country.

**McDonald's has taken learnings from the Roundtable and committed and invested millions of dollars in partnership projects with its suppliers to increase the sustainability of its poultry**

**supply chain.** One example of this is the Roundtable partnership and the US-RSPE Sustainability Framework. Another type of project example is the SMART Broiler project focused on innovation in outcomes-based poultry welfare assessments. This work is currently underway with matching funding from the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research. It is an innovation-focused effort using leading edge technology, and McDonald's is not retaining intellectual property on this project, so that it can benefit the sector as whole.

### **Conclusions**

I share this with you today to offer some good news and reassurance that the entire poultry supply chain is behind proactively improving and communicating about their sustainability — not resisting it. **In poultry, we are not divided by industry or discipline but have found a way to work together at a higher, precompetitive level to find paths that work for everyone.** Our farmers, equipment manufacturers and veterinarians work side by side with environmental groups, welfare organizations and consumer-facing businesses such as McDonald's and food retailers to improve together. McDonald's is proud to be a part of this rapidly growing organization and its projects and to speak with you about this work. From minimizing how much packaging we use to investing in renewable energy and partnering with organizations such as the Roundtable to advance sustainable and regenerative agriculture practices — we want to help protect our planet for communities today and in the future.

**Your efforts to secure funding and direction that provide resources to the No. 1 most consumed protein in the United States will be put to good use and amplified by independent efforts like those of the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Poultry & Eggs.**

I'll do my best now to entertain any questions you have. I have specific areas I can speak to in my position and experience. I will take any questions I cannot answer today back to the Roundtable and tap into our community of experts for more information. Thank you for your time and interest in the U.S. poultry and egg sector.

Additional specific issue inquiries are welcome and can be brought to US-RSPE experts for consideration at any time by contacting US-RSPE staff.

This testimony was respectfully submitted on February 1, 2022, by Ernie Meier, director of quality, McDonald's USA, and chair of the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Poultry & Eggs and prepared with support from staff from the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Poultry & Eggs.

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Sources:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uspoultry.org/economic-data/>

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## **More About the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Poultry & Eggs**

*Create, Collect and Communicate Objective Sustainability Data —*

### **THE US-RSPE SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK**

Logically, the first of what we call “movable boulders” in our way was that lack of objective, comprehensive and consistently measured sustainability data at the supply chain level. Temple Grandin says it regarding welfare, but it applies to sustainability as well when she says that you cannot improve what you aren’t measuring. We need measures. We are always looking for more support to expedite our work from USDA and other means, but the Roundtable determined we could not wait to start building.

Thankfully, we began this work before COVID-19 altered our way of work and life, and we have been able to march ahead quickly and stay connected virtually to complete the first-ever full supply chain sustainability framework for U.S. chicken, turkey and eggs (which I will refer to going forward as “the Framework”). We wrapped the development process in December last year and are in full speed to create the software tool to collect the data within this year.

The US-RSPE Sustainability Framework is structured to address the areas of greatest priority to the supply chain and its stakeholders (Figure 1). They were selected and agreed upon by our multistakeholder working group and informed by our public and private comment period input processes. Within each of these areas are custom metrics that will challenge users to measure and track indicators of sustainability within that area with varying levels of complexity and advancement. In essence, they form the roadmap for any part of the poultry and egg supply chain to see how they contribute to the sustainability of the whole and see where they need to be improving.

The results of this effort will yield an objective data set on the current sustainability of U.S. chicken, turkey and eggs that will better inform and expedite improvement projects such as technology

innovations, pilot projects, grants and more to ensure that poultry products are sustainably produced and available — meeting the expectations of U.S. citizens and our global customers while strengthening the supply chain. We hope to have enough participation in this voluntary project to release data as early as next year and hold confidence in the accuracy of the data as sample of the whole sector.

FIGURE 1:

## US-RSPE Framework Structure (Finalized December 2021)



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### HOW IT WORKS

Each entity (farmer, processor, integrator, breeder, retailer, restaurant, etc.) will complete a series of 101 metrics across 15 priority areas with their individual and/or partner data. This will be anonymized and aggregated into data on the supply chain level by product (chicken, turkey or eggs) to provide an objective and holistic look at the sustainability of poultry production. Our first year will be to set that crucial baseline and give everyone working on solutions a gut-check on if they're working in the right areas. From there, we can expedite progress in sustainability by having a clear picture of the true hot spots and success stories to calibrate our efforts for the more efficient and impactful sustainability investments we can make. Right now, it is overwhelming to look at the areas in need of improvement as a never-ending to-do list instead of being able to triage areas based on impact and opportunity for improvements.

### DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



Far beyond anything tackled by this industry before, comments and member engagement incorporated input from consumers, world-renowned researchers, environmental groups, feed associations, farmer-led organizations, welfare experts, social compliance and safety organizations, restaurant chains, retailers and grocery stores and poultry producers, processors, suppliers, breeders and everyone in between in allied industries. The development process included two recently completed public comment periods, which generated just under 200 comments, and eight full supply chain pilot assessments across three industries (chicken, turkey and eggs) completed earlier this year.

## **SECURING PARTICIPATION**

US-RSPE has built the Framework to be scalable to meet users where they are in their sustainability progress, offering options to measure using multiple levels of metrics. The flexibility included in the US-RSPE Framework allows for internal progress to be fueled in tandem with supply-chain level efforts, showing each entity their strengths, weaknesses and what they should be working on to improve and contribute to a sustainably produced protein product.

### SIDEBAR:

#### **PUBLIC EXCERPTS FROM SUPPORTING PARTNERS**

“What we’re building here will be instantly useful. People want to know how poultry and eggs reach their tables sustainably. With the US-RSPE Framework metrics, we will be able to answer the call to provide transparent reporting on the sustainable processes in place and build better plans to improve... In a time where numerous requests are being made to complete surveys and sign onto commitments that have varying approaches and intentions, I am most excited about the US-RSPE Sustainability Framework. Because it was built specifically for poultry and eggs, I can integrate it into our existing sustainability easily. And I’m confident the metrics included are important to our stakeholders.” — **Lankford Ruffin, director of environmental affairs and sustainability for Butterball.**

“As protein demand continues to rise globally, it’s more critical than ever that poultry products are produced in a way that conserves finite resources and considers impacts like land use, water quality and waste produced. This collaboration is essential to continue to raise the bar on advancing U.S. leadership in sustainable protein.” —**Courtney Hall, director of sustainable livestock systems, World Wildlife Fund.**

“The setup of the Framework allows all our growers to get a more accurate picture of their own sustainability and challenge them to improve significantly without overwhelming them with unattainable goals. What a lot of these types of tools that are out there now lack is scalability and an understanding of the complexities of the poultry supply chain.” — **John Starkey, president of the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association.**

“We know our customers are increasingly interested in knowing more about their food and where it comes from, which in turn guides our company’s broader commitments on food quality and sourcing. Our work with the US-RSPE not only aligns with our current supply chain standards, but also furthers our work to advance environmentally and socially conscious practices for the animals in our supply chain while allowing us to meet customer expectations.” — **Ernie Meier, director of quality for McDonald’s USA.**

“It’s really exciting to be able to do this work and see all parts of the supply chain, even those that your company doesn’t take part in and may be several steps up or downstream from where you are, come together to create a clear picture of our sustainability.” — **Kristin Tupa, sustainability manager at Cargill Protein.**

“We’ve built the one thing everyone needs but nobody has yet. With the US-RSPE Framework metrics, organizations will be able to provide transparent reporting on their sustainability and build plans to improve.” — **Ryan Bennett, executive director of US-RSPE**

“To secure a thriving food system for the future, the food industry has an opportunity – and responsibility – to help mitigate the impacts of climate change and find more sustainable ways to feed people. I’m proud of McDonald’s commitment to accelerate action and achieve the widespread adoption of more sustainable practices, even as we navigate the impact of COVID-19. Drawing on the support of our Franchises, suppliers and producers we can continue to build a more sustainable and resilient industry.” — **Francesca DeBiase, Executive Vice President, Chief Supply Chain Officer, McDonald’s Corporation.**

*More About McDonald’s USA:*

- As the global population grows, we need to feed more people in increasingly sustainable ways. McDonald’s can use our scale to play an important role in that effort.
- We believe that more of our food can be produced in a way that not only protects the environment and contributes positively to a thriving global food system but also helps rehabilitate and enhance ecosystems around farms through better soil health, improved water management and increased biodiversity.

- We've made it a global priority to champion sustainability efforts across our supply chain, starting in the areas where we believe we can have the largest impact.
- We have identified seven priority impact areas for us to address through our goals:
  - Climate change
  - Farmer livelihoods
  - Protecting water resources
  - Conserving forests
  - Reducing food and packaging waste
  - Respecting human rights
  - Promoting the health and welfare of animals
- In 2018, we became the world's first restaurant company to set a science-based target to reduce GHG emissions related to McDonald's restaurants, as well as reduce emissions intensity (per metric ton of food and packaging) across our supply chain.
- McDonald's suppliers representing approximately 80% of our spend are asked to report to [CDP](#) on Climate Change and Forests efforts, including 100% of our globally managed beef, chicken, dairy and cheese suppliers. We regularly update this guidance and assess emerging risks across the supply chain.
- Across the globe, our markets are in various phases of strategy development, and in 2020 we launched a new internal climate data and insights platform to support market-level local climate strategies and track progress.

### **MCDONALD'S COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS: SMART BROILER**

In October of 2017, McDonald's committed to an outcome-based chicken welfare strategy. This means McDonald's would establish standardized Key Welfare Indicators (KWI's), KWIs are similar to a business Key Performance Indicator and provide an overall indication of the welfare environment a bird has had throughout its life.

Once established, McDonald's will collect KWIs across its global chicken supply chain and aggregate the outcomes in a database format. We then utilize that information to inform where improvement opportunities exist, set improvement targets, then work with our suppliers to continually improve. This allows the birds to tell us where improvements are needed on an ongoing basis.

McDonald's understood that in order to gather KWI's in a standardized and representative way we would need to utilize technology. Unfortunately, that technology did not yet commercially exist, especially to gather welfare data at the farm level.



To address this, McDonald's committed \$2 million to identify and advance technologies that measure and report chicken welfare at the farm level, specifically focusing on monitoring bird leg health, walking ability and activity & behavior.

McDonald's partnered with the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR) to establish the SMART (Sensing, Monitoring, Reporting, Technology) Broiler Program. FFAR Matched McDonald's \$2 million and together we launched a global, public request for proposals. We understood that technologies that supported our goals existed in other business sectors, they just hadn't yet been applied to animal welfare or agriculture. To support these efforts The US Poultry and Egg Association, Amazon Web Services and Accenture joined as program sponsors.

The proposal process received submissions from all over the world and six leading solutions were selected for the SMART Broiler Program.

SMART Broiler researchers are nearing the end of Phase 1 research trials where they are working to demonstrate proof of concept of their original proposals. Those that demonstrate the most future promise and value will be refunded for Phase 2 trials to bring their technologies closer to commercialization.

\*\* McDonald's and FFAR are not retaining any intellectual property through the program. The intent is to help evolve solutions that assist in better understanding and improving welfare.

More Resources on Poultry Sector Sustainability:

- The U.S. broiler industry recently conducted and update on a full life cycle assessment.
  - Between 2010 and 2020 in the broiler chicken sector, resources needed and output declined while productivity increased.(LCA).
  - Intensity measures declined. For every kilogram of live weight of broiler produced during the 10-year time period:
    - Land use was reduced by 13%.
    - Water consumption was reduced 13%.
    - Greenhouse gas emissions were reduced 18%.
    - Fossil resources use reduced 22%.
    - Particulate forming emissions were reduced by 22%.
- On-farm broiler mortality rates have reduced 72% since 1925 to 2020 (LCA).

- OSHA recordable injuries and illnesses reduced by 86% in the last 25 years (1995-2020) ([LCA](#)).
  - An estimated 65% of the cost of raising a chicken is the feed (NCC).
  - The top export markets of U.S. chicken meat are Mexico, China, Taiwan, Cuba and Canada ([2020 USDA/Economic Research Service](#)).
  - The top export markets of U.S. turkey meat are Mexico, China, Canada, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic ([2020 USDA/Economic Research Service](#)).
  - The combined value of production from broilers, eggs, turkeys, and the value of sales from chickens in 2020 was \$35.5 billion, down 11% from \$40.0 billion in 2019. Of the combined total, 61% was from broilers, 24% from eggs, 15% from turkeys, and less than 1% from chickens ([Source: USDA/NASS Poultry Production and Value 2020 Summary](#)). The 2022 estimates indicate a recovery back to growth.
  - The prevalence of *Salmonella* in raw chicken is at an all-time low. 88% of all broiler establishments are meeting and exceeding the FSIS performance standard for *Salmonella* on chicken parts like wings, breast and drumsticks (NCC).
  - Over 95% of poultry litter is recycled and reused to fertilize crops. Farmers collect and store litter to be used as an organic fertilizer for crops, creating a closed nutrient loop ([NCC](#)).
  - Today, about one-third less water and half the amount of feed are required to produce a dozen eggs versus the water and feed used in the 1960s.
  - Landmark 50-Year Study Documents U.S. Egg Industry Reduced Environmental Footprint (American Egg Board).
    - Similarly, compared with 1960 laying hens, 2010 laying hens have:
      - 26 percent less daily feed use
      - 27 percent higher hen-day egg production
      - 42 percent better feed conversion
      - 57 percent lower mortality
      - 32 percent less direct water use per dozen eggs produced
    - The analysis showed the following reductions in the environmental footprint per kg of eggs produced in the U.S. over the 50-year time interval considered:
      - 65 percent lower acidifying emissions
      - 71 percent lower eutrophying emissions
      - 71 percent lower GHG emissions
      - 31 percent lower CED
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