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How Do We Nourish Nine Billion People?



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In a world where 2 billion people are undernourished, 1.4 billion are overweight or obese, and 800 million are hungry, what is the blueprint for strengthening access to nutritious foods and sustainable agriculture? What food and nutrition priorities should the international community set as the UN's Millennium Development Goals expire?

Those were among the questions that I and four other panelists grappled with recently at this year's Aspen Ideas Festival. As the sole CEO in the group, this is the question that I cared about most: what role should the private sector take on in addressing these challenges?

My short answer to that question is that no company, including Panera, has done enough.

Sure, Panera has a philanthropic arm, through which we give \$100 million in unsold baked goods and cash every year to food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the country. But at times, those efforts have felt inauthentic. Day-old product goes out the door, but we don't really know where it

ends up. Although we're a food retailer, we've lacked a direct connection with the people in need who receive our food.

So, four years ago, we rolled out Panera Cares community cafes at which people eat good-tasting, nutritious food and pay whatever they can afford. And last year, I briefly experienced hunger firsthand when I spent a week participating in Feeding America's SNAP Challenge.

However, in launching the community cafes and in understanding hunger in a small but personal way, I've concluded that we must go further. A vital step is to continue to use our scale to build markets for nutritious foods that are grown sustainably.

Ten years ago, we decided to serve chicken raised without antibiotics, despite a woefully inadequate supply. In doing so, we gave farmers a big incentive to raise antibiotic-free chicken and thereby created a market where none previously existed. Today, we're doing the same thing with antibiotic-free turkey and ham.

As a market develops, the costs come down and more people can access better, more nutritious foods. It's a win-win for farmers, suppliers, food retailers and, most of all, consumers.

It will be interesting to see the impact of Walmart's decision to stock organic produce. This wouldn't have been possible ten years ago. The costs were prohibitive and the supply didn't exist. But it takes someone to make that first leap, as we did with chicken. When they do, everyone benefits.

Here's another way that the private sector can do more: provide greater transparency around food ingredients. As part of our effort to bring some sunlight to this challenge, Panera is using ingredients that you can actually pronounce.

We've removed all added MSG and other artificial trans fats from our bakery-cafe food menu and we are actively working with our suppliers to remove *all* artificial additives by the end of 2016. This speaks to our belief that we not only owe it to our customers to disclose what's in our food, but we must push harder to ensure that we're part of a broader solution.

Through these and other initiatives, we aim to inspire or, if necessary, provoke other companies to contribute to society in a way that goes beyond philanthropy and instead harnesses those nonrenewable resources—their time and know-how—to directly address the world's inequities.

It's my hope that other chief executives in our industry will conclude that we have a fiduciary duty to address the problem of food insecurity and our broken food system. In Panera's case, we serve eight million people each week and have 80,000 associates who count on us. We have an obligation to lean into the problems and issues as we see them and use our scale and power to take on the toughest challenges.

It's the right thing to do for our self-respect. And it's the right thing to do for our business.