



CASE STUDY SERIES

ENGAGING IN CLIMATE POLICY

THROUGH

COLLABORATIVE ORGANIZING

Featuring:



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ENGAGING IN POLICY TO MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE

Although corporate action is critical, it is not sufficient to overcome our climate challenges. The global nature of climate change – a true “tragedy of the commons” – makes it too easy for the efforts of climate-forward corporations to be rendered moot by the actions of others that fail to act in a similarly climate-friendly manner. Only with government policies and enforcement can we hope to enact the kinds of sweeping changes needed to level the playing field for businesses and truly move the needle on climate change.

Climate Collaborative committed company Mountain Rose Herbs began collaborating with other companies and nonprofits to increase their impact on climate-friendly policies in their home state of Oregon. Their efforts serve as an excellent example for other companies considering taking the plunge into policy engagement.

A NEW, HIGHLY COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The 2016 election was a wake-up call for Mountain Rose Herbs’ Vice President, Shawn Donille, who realized the company lacked a strategic approach to policy engagement on key issues they championed, including climate change. In response, he spearheaded a comprehensive company-wide approach to local and state-level policy engagement that aligned with the company’s ethos and mission. Shawn then went one crucial step further to increase Mountain Rose Herbs’ impact by forming a coalition of like-minded local businesses to leverage their collective influence.

Mountain Rose Herbs has built a coalition of roughly 15 businesses and nonprofits working towards shared goals on climate policy engagement. Just over a year into their efforts, they’ve already seen wins including electing a new, more conservation-friendly board at the state’s Board of Forestry. These early victories help build momentum to continue to grow the coalition and its efforts to advocate for more climate-friendly policy in Oregon.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2016, Mountain Rose Herbs began engaging in policy by inviting state and local elected officials to tour their facilities. The tours provided an opportunity to share more about their work and its impact on the community. It was during these tours that Shawn realized there was no convening policy body for the natural products industry to come together and engage through. So, he took it on himself to start one.

Shawn began the coalition-building process by partnering with the Oregon Organic Coalition on putting together a survey of employment numbers in the industry with the goal of demonstrating the scale of Oregon’s organics industry.

To ramp up and organize their efforts, Mountain Rose Herbs contracted with Sawnee Services, a public interest political consulting and lobbying company led by Jonathan Manton. On behalf of Mountain Rose Herbs, Jonathan oversees a variety of political engagement efforts including candidate outreach, coalition building, and direct advocacy to elected officials at the county, state and federal level.

Shawn and Jonathan invited natural products companies to collaborate on policy issues. Mountain Rose Herbs has developed a policy engagement roadmap for the coalition of businesses and nonprofits in Lane County, Oregon. The primary purpose of this informal “trade group” is to elevate the natural products industry’s voice in policy decisions on climate change and other issues.

Decisions and priorities are made by consensus with Shawn and Jonathan facilitating and guiding the group’s work. They meet one to two times per month and there are no membership dues to participate. Members are welcome to participate as fully or as little as they like.

Together, the group identified a core set of priorities to guide their efforts:

- Pollinator and plant protection (regulating and eliminating where possible neonicotinoid pesticides, and aerial spraying of herbicides)
- Elevating the dialogue on the effects of climate change on agriculture, including the benefits of organic agriculture vs. conventional
- Promoting the organics industry at the state and county levels to demonstrate the economic success of clean, green values and business practices
- Acquiring additional state funded resources for farmers seeking to transition from conventional to organic agricultural practices
- Educating policy makers with factual data to correct inaccurate or misleading assertions made in defense of carbon emitting industries

In addition to supporting policies that align with these priorities, the coalition is also focused on helping to elect candidates who share their values and vision for the future. They host candidate forums and individual meetings with candidates to build relationships while determining the extent to which candidates deserve their support. For viable campaigns where financial assistance can increase the chances of winning key races, they make contributions and help organize events to encourage others to also give.

KEY STRATEGIES TO SUCCESS

Hiring a Political Consultant

Mountain Rose Herbs did not have the in-house policy expertise or resources to do independent lobbying, nor did any of the other companies in the coalition. Often public interest driven companies and organizations share initial reluctance to engage in ‘lobbying’ in part because of the negative connotations affiliated with lobbyists. Mountain Rose Herbs

recognized that by not engaging in lobbying efforts their industry was absent from the decision-making process. To fill this gap, they hired an experienced, public interest focused lobbyist and consultant to represent their interests before all levels of government. Jonathan has over 15 years of professional political experience working with candidates and causes. On behalf of Mountain Rose Herbs and the Oregon Organic Coalition, he now works to empower coalitions, draft and advocate for policy changes, and strengthen relationships with elected officials. They will continue to grow and engage with policy makers and track votes in order to hold officials accountable to promises made on the campaign trail.

Collaborating with the Trade Group

The collaborative entity Mountain Rose Herbs has built through the ongoing trade group meetings is a strong vehicle for policy engagement efforts. The group has focused on letter-writing campaigns, in-person meetings with candidates and state representatives and even hosting political events. The trade group meetings range from casual gatherings to more formal meetings in Salem with Mountain Rose Herbs' COO and CFO. They've also presented at local trade association meetings such as the Willamette Valley Sustainable Foods Alliance annual meeting and the Oregon Organic Coalition luncheon.



One example of their work is the *Against Aerial Spraying Campaign*. The group drafted a letter demanding a ban on aerial spraying that was signed by organic industry coalition members and sent to State and County representatives. They also took out an ad in the Eugene Weekly to coincide with the letter's delivery. The campaign received enough signatures to have the initiative put on a ballot for the May 2018 election but is currently tied up in litigation in the Oregon Court of Appeals.



The coalition also partnered with the Oregon Organic Coalition and policy analyst, Lynn Coody to quantify the organic industry's impact in Oregon. Over the next year, they plan to expand their survey to

include the entire state and to collect data on economic outcomes, in addition to employment. This data will help the trade group illustrate the organic industry's growing impact in Oregon, lending weight to its advocacy efforts.

KEY CHALLENGES

S-C-H-E-D-U-L-E-S! The biggest hurdle so far has been carving out group meeting times that work for all for the members. In order to streamline the consensus-based decision-making process, Mountain Rose Herbs requests that owners or CEOs serve as the representatives. It's been difficult to get all of them to the table at least once a month, especially those from the smaller companies. However, proactive planning and consistent reminders have helped to improve meeting attendance.

RESULTS

Although the group is still relatively new, their efforts are already bearing fruit! Results to date include:

- Working collaboratively with the Governor's office and members of the coalition, two new appointees to the Oregon Board of Forestry were recently confirmed by the State Senate. They supported these candidates believing them to have open minds toward conservation goals. The previous tilt of the Board of Forestry was overwhelmingly in favor of practices such as widespread aerial spraying of herbicides.
- Their proposal to regulate noenicitinoids and chlorpyrifos, insecticides commonly used in conventional agriculture, was adopted by the 30+ members of the Oregon Conservation Network as one of 4 OCN Priorities for 2019.
- Legislation is currently being drafted to better regulate pesticides, limit aerial spraying, require better reporting of pesticide use state wide, and increase state funded assistance to organic farmers. They will be working with legislators over the next months, and likely years to secure passage of these bills. They will also engage this session with coalition members and allies to support efforts to reduce plastic and protect ocean environments from waste.

ABOUT MOUNTAIN ROSE HERBS

Based in Eugene, Oregon, Mountain Rose Herbs is a grower, processor, distributor, and retailer of herbs, spices, teas, and essential oils. Celebrating over 30 years in business, they're known for organic, sustainably sourced, and wild harvested products. Mountain Rose Herbs is also a member of Sustainable Food Trade Association, a Climate Collaborative partner and co-founder.