

# Contribution of Food Companies to UAE's National Agenda on **Sustainability** and **Economic Diversification**



الأغذية المتحدة  
United Foods

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## Executive Summary

The UAE is shaping its future with ambitious agendas such as the UAE Centennial 2071, the Net Zero 2050 Roadmap, or the Circular Economy Policy 2021-2031. Food companies have an opportunity and a responsibility to contribute to the national objectives by aligning their strategies with the country's pursuits. The UAE's food sector is at an important period, with the potential to drive economic growth while also addressing the urgent demand for sustainability and innovation.

This whitepaper focuses on the changing environment of the UAE's food industry, highlighting its crucial importance to the country's economic diversification ambitions and potential to lead the way in sustainable development. It examines how food producers, suppliers, and innovators collaborate to boost local production, reduce environmental impact, and promote a circular economy. By embracing innovative technologies, eco-friendly practices, and forward-thinking rules, these businesses not only meet consumer demands but also strengthen the UAE's position as a global leader in sustainable development.

Furthermore, this overview provides insight into the issues that food companies face, from resource restrictions to regulatory challenges, by conducting an in-depth analysis of industry practices and real-world case studies. It also identifies opportunities for expansion, innovation, and cooperation that are consistent with the UAE's vision for a sustainable and economically resilient future.

## Key Findings

UAE's leading food companies are actively implementing sustainability initiatives to address key challenges. Companies sampled have reduced their GHG emissions through renewable energy adoption and improved water reuse systems, while others focus on water-efficient irrigation and energy efficiency to minimise their environmental footprint. They are also working to reduce food import dependence by boosting local production while reducing plastic waste and optimising packaging.

Reduction of water consumption across companies by

**10–15%**

through advanced conservation methods.



Closed-loop systems for wastewater reuse and smart irrigation systems have proven

**largely effective** in reducing waste water.

Companies are reducing greenhouse gas emissions through renewable energy and energy efficiency, with some adopting targets aligned with the Science-Based Targets initiative (SBTi) and integrating alternative fuels.

One of the companies sampled achieved a decrease of

**8.4 million**

litres in fuel consumption through improved efficiency in their machinery and operations.



Companies are shifting to **recyclable packaging** to reduce environmental impact and improve materials' **traceability** for sustainability compliance.

Upward trend on **recycling rates**, reducing waste **diverted** from landfills, and embedding **circular economy** principles in their operations.





# Introduction

The food industry in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is currently going through a major period of change and development, where the integration of sustainability and innovation is critical to supporting the nation's ambitious long-term goals. Historically reliant on food imports, the UAE has been actively working to build a resilient, locally driven, and sustainable food system that aligns with its broader objectives of economic diversification and environmental stewardship.

Food companies play an important role in this transition, leveraging their ability to address food security challenges, reduce environmental impact, and contribute to human capital development through job creation and innovation. This alignment is strongly influenced by the UAE's key national initiatives, which provide a strategic framework for the nation's sustainability journey.

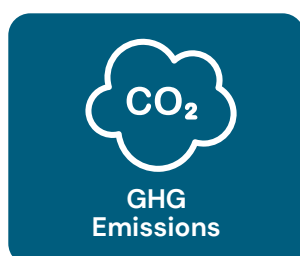
*We the UAE 2031* and the *Energy Strategy 2050* prioritise economic growth and energy transition, while the *UAE 2050 Net Zero Strategic Initiative* outlines a pathway for achieving net-zero emissions. Long-term goals such as *UAE Centennial 2071* and the *UAE Circular Economy Policy 2021-2031* emphasise resource efficiency, technological advancement, and a shift toward a circular economy model. These frameworks show how crucial it is to implement smart, sustainable ideas in order to accomplish the objectives of the country.

This paper focuses on how the food industry can align its activities with national priorities to promote economic growth, protect the environment, and act responsibly toward society. Prepared by United Foods, the paper shares its own efforts and lessons learned from other top peers in the industry. Its goal is to encourage companies to work together, share useful practices, and tackle common challenges. By doing so, it aims to help the food sector grow in a way that supports national and global sustainability goals

Organisations such as United Foods Company and other industry leaders are advancing sustainability goals by addressing key challenges in the sector. These challenges include the transition from reliance on non-renewable energy sources to renewable alternatives, effective management of food and packaging waste to minimise environmental impact, and the development of innovative, sustainable product lines that meet evolving consumer demands without compromising profitability. This overview investigates how food businesses could implement a similar strategy, using best practices and connecting with national agendas to achieve sustainable growth.

# Navigating Environmental Stewardship

Effective management of environmental impact is essential for food companies, as their operations depend heavily on resources such as water, soil, energy, and packaging materials. This reliance makes them particularly vulnerable to physical risks from climate change, including supply chain disruptions. Proactively managing environmental impacts not only reduces waste, minimises pollution, and preserves these resources for future use, but companies that address environmental concerns can lower costs and improve efficiency. Furthermore, neglecting environmental impact management exposes organisations to significant transition risks, such as regulatory penalties and losing market share to environmentally conscious competitors. It can also harm a company's reputation, making it more challenging to attract customers and investors.



## Efficient Use of Resources

Water and waste management are at the centre of UAE food companies' sustainability initiatives, especially in the MENA region, where arid temperatures and limited water supplies present unique challenges. Water conservation and responsible waste handling are important not just for environmental reasons but also for surviving the region's harsh weather and soil conditions. By reimagining how water is used and reused, these companies address environmental and operational concerns more sustainably.

In response to these challenges, food companies in the UAE are continuously working to optimise their water consumption. For example, United Foods has implemented advanced water recycling technologies, successfully repurposing 920,000 litres of water across its operations in 2023. Similarly, other peers have also become key contributors to water management, with one achieving an impressive 80% water recycling rate at one of its sites and the other one committing to a 15% reduction in water usage by 2025 through innovative irrigation methods.

These exceptional efforts play a role in advancing the UAE's Green Agenda 2030, with one of its key objectives being the sustainable use of natural resources. Furthermore, these efforts support the broader ambitions of the *We the UAE 2031* Policy, particularly its "Forward Ecosystem" pillar, which aims to create a sustainable, innovative and resilient framework to guide the nation's growth and development in the years ahead.





On the waste management front, significant progress has been made by food companies in the UAE, reflecting their commitment to sustainability. A notable example is the impressive 64% recycling rate by a large multi-sector company studied. This achievement is supported by initiatives such as converting used cooking oil into biodiesel, a creative approach that not only reduces waste but also contributes to renewable energy production.

Similarly, a local peer from Abu Dhabi has demonstrated its dedication to waste diversion through strategic partnerships with organisations like Veolia. These collaborations are key to enhancing waste management practices and have resulted in successful waste diversion efforts.

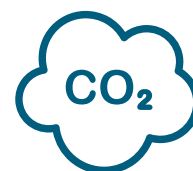
## Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions

In line with the UAE's ongoing efforts to reduce its emissions impact, both at the local and international levels, the country's food industry is adopting a proactive approach to combating climate change through strategic GHG emissions

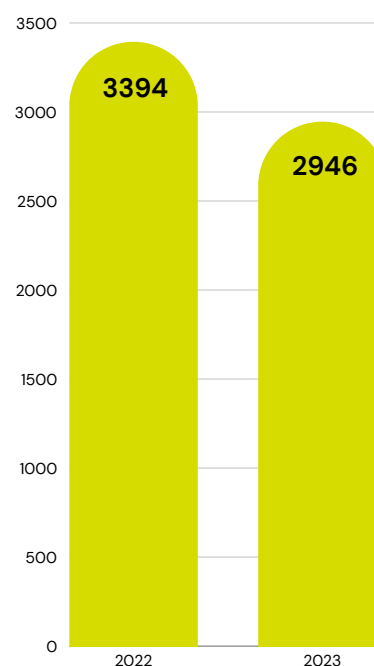
reduction initiatives. At the local level, the UAE is setting ambitious targets through the UAE Energy Strategy 2050, the UAE Green Agenda 2030, and the UAE Net Zero 2050, all aimed at transforming the nation's energy landscape and sustainability practices. On the global stage, the UAE has committed to reducing net GHG emissions to 182 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e by 2030 as part of its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

The UAE's food sector is demonstrating its commitment to these national and international goals through significant actions in emissions reduction.

Companies like United Foods are at the forefront of these efforts, implementing comprehensive decarbonisation strategies. United Foods has successfully reduced its Scope 2 emissions by 15.22% by maximizing the use of renewable energy. This was achieved by installing solar panels across the entire rooftop of one of their facilities and incorporating biofuels into their operations.



United Foods – Scope 2 emissions in tCO<sub>2</sub>e





Similarly, its Saudi-based peer is taking bold steps by committing to source 20% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2025, further supporting the UAE's transition to a more sustainable and low-carbon future.

Such initiatives represent more than mere compliance; they signify a fundamental shift towards a more sustainable and environmentally conscious food production ecosystem in the UAE, positioning the sector at the forefront of global sustainability efforts.

## Sustainable Packaging

In alignment with the UAE's Green Agenda 2030, which emphasises sustainable resource use, and the UAE Centennial 2071, which champions innovation through a diversified knowledge economy, the country's food and beverage sector is increasingly adopting innovative packaging solutions as a core strategy for environmental sustainability.

Companies across the country are leading the way with groundbreaking packaging technologies that challenge the traditional reliance on single-use materials. United Foods, for example, has introduced biodegradable margarine packaging, marking a significant advancement in sustainable packaging solutions. This initiative addresses the environmental concerns associated with conventional plastic packaging by offering a more eco-friendly alternative. On the other hand, a peer based in the emirate of Abu Dhabi has developed plant-based water bottles, exemplifying a progressive shift towards circular economy principles.

Additionally, a multinational company focused on frozen meats and oil is working towards more sustainable packaging by utilising recyclable materials, such as cardboard boxes for margarine packaging. The company has set a goal to make 100% of its packaging recyclable, reusable, or biodegradable by 2025. As of 2023, it has already made significant progress, with 88% of its packaging meeting this objective. Notably, their progress in Brazil has increased from 83% to 87%, while global achievements have reached 93%.

By investing in such innovative packaging technologies, companies are not only reducing their carbon footprint but also setting new industry benchmarks for sustainable product design and packaging. These efforts are reshaping the food and beverage sector's approach to environmental stewardship and contributing to the broader goals of the UAE's sustainability agenda.







## Product Innovation

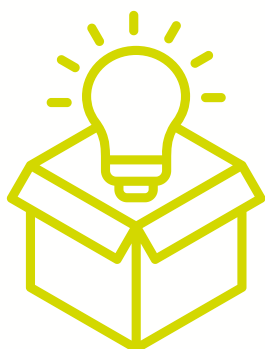
With its rich multicultural background and drive to stay ahead of the latest trends, the UAE is constantly evolving to meet the changing desires and needs of its consumers. This dynamic environment has spurred the food industry to innovate strategically, particularly in addressing the growing demand for environmentally friendly and health-conscious products.

A notable example is United Foods's Vitamin A, D, and E-fortified "Nawar Lite Margarine," which has become a game-changer for consumer health and well-being. These essential vitamins provide numerous health benefits, including immune system support and improved bone health.

All Nawar margarine tubs, including "Nawar Lite Margarine", "Nawar Olive Oil Margarine", and "Nawar Sunflower-based Margarine" are reduced-fat options designed to provide balanced, healthier choices. These products are part of a broader range aimed at addressing obesity and encouraging healthier lifestyle changes in the region. The range also includes sunflower oil, corn oil, canola oil, blended oils, and other industrial fats, all of which are free from trans fats.



**Nawar Lite Margarine was also recognised with the prestigious GCC Innovative Product of the Year award.**



Similarly, another trend in the industry is the significant strides with plant-based meat product lines, which cater to the growing consumer preference for sustainable and nutritious meat alternatives. These meat alternative products are developed with a focus on regenerative agriculture and supporting environmentally responsible consumption practices.



# Growth Through Diversification and Innovation

As outlined in the UAE's Green Agenda 2030, with its focus on fostering a competitive knowledge economy, the *We the UAE 2031* Policy, underscoring the Forward Economy pillar, and the long-term UAE Centennial 2071 Policy, with its diversified knowledge economy pillar, the UAE is committed to establishing one of the world's most competitive and innovative economies. These strategic frameworks highlight the importance of productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship, economic diversification, and job creation as essential components for achieving these ambitious targets. However, the success of these objectives depends heavily on the active participation of the private sector.



Economic  
Diversification



Job Creation



Sustainable  
Finance

## Economic Diversification

The UAE's food sector is central to the country's economic diversification strategy, with initiatives designed to reduce reliance on imports and strengthen food security. These measures also aim to minimise the nation's vulnerability to global market fluctuations. Companies such as United Foods and one of its multisector peers have made substantial investments in local manufacturing capabilities.



The retail sector is the **third-largest**, while manufacturing is the **fourth-largest** contributor to the UAE's GDP.

United Foods streamlined its operations by centralising production at a modern facility in Dubai's Jebel Ali Industrial Area, enhancing efficiency and capacity. It also invested AED 100 million in local suppliers to build a robust supply chain. The multi-sector peer implemented energy efficiency measures, such as optimising chiller plants and industrial systems, to reduce emissions and improve resource utilisation in local manufacturing. This strategic approach not only supports the local economy but also lowers the environmental impact associated with transportation.



## Job Creation

The rapid growth of the UAE's food sector is also driving significant employment opportunities. Projections indicate that the sector will generate approximately 20,000 new jobs by 2030, making it a vital contributor to the nation's economic growth and social development. The vast majority of the companies studied understand the importance of their role and are at the forefront of workforce development, emphasising skills enhancement and capacity building to meet the sector's expanding demands. These efforts not only support the employment market but also align with the UAE's broader vision of fostering human capital as a key driver of long-term development.

20,000 new jobs  
by **2030**



## Sustainable Finance

Sustainable finance is driving significant advances in the food sector, with trends like sustainability-linked financing, where loans and bonds are linked to goals such as lowering emissions or improving water usage.

Agrifood companies are targeting regenerative agriculture to restore ecosystems, enhance soil health, and minimise chemical use, whereas circular economy investments are centred on waste minimisation and resource reuse, such as sustainable packaging. Green bonds are becoming more popular for funding renewable energy and sustainable agriculture initiatives.








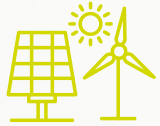

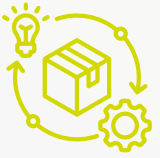


# Challenges and Opportunities

## Challenges

Material Topic	Challenge	Solution
 <b>High energy consumption</b>	Food production requires significant energy, contributing to high carbon emissions.	Companies are integrating renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, into their operations to mitigate emissions.
 <b>Waste Management</b>	Sustainable waste management for food and packaging remains a major concern across the sector.	F&B companies are partnering up with companies like Veolia and Tetra Pak to turn waste into a valuable resource.
 <b>Complex Regulatory Framework</b>	The UAE's Net Zero 2050 roadmap and evolving regulations challenge businesses to comply while maintaining efficiency and competitiveness.	Companies are adopting solar energy, biofuels, water recycling, and circular economy practices to align with regulations.

## Opportunities

Material Topic	Challenge	Leveraging
 <b>Renewable Energy Integration</b>	Businesses can reduce costs and emissions while developing cleaner, more sustainable operations by switching to solar or other renewable energy sources.	The sample shows renewable energy is both economical and environmentally beneficial, proving its practicality for companies.
 <b>Local Supplier Engagement</b>	Procuring from local suppliers helps companies cut transportation-related emissions, creates community jobs, and nurtures regional economic growth.	Companies are building smarter, greener supply chains that support the UAE's broader economic goals. By focusing on sustainability, they are increasing their procurement from local suppliers.
 <b>Expanding Eco-Friendly Product Lines</b>	There is an increase in demand for products that promote health and sustainability. This growing demand reflects a shift toward eco-friendly, natural, and responsibly made goods.	In order to meet the increasing demand for sustainable and health-conscious products, companies are launching new lines of organic and plant-based products.





# Best Practices for Success

Adopting renewable energy solutions is a critical step for food companies in reducing their carbon footprint and aligning with global and national sustainability targets. Transitioning to clean energy sources, such as solar power and biofuels, can significantly lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while enhancing operational efficiency. These renewable energy options not only mitigate environmental impacts but also provide long-term economic benefits by reducing dependency on fossil fuels and stabilising energy costs. The integration of circular economy principles into waste management strategies is another essential avenue for sustainability.

By prioritising waste reduction, recycling, and resource optimisation, food companies can minimise their environmental impact. Circular economy practices include initiatives such as repurposing food waste into animal feed or bioenergy and implementing closed-loop recycling systems for packaging materials. These efforts contribute to a reduction in landfill use and align with the UAE's Circular Economy Policy 2021–2031.

Furthermore, building strong connections with the community through health and wellness programs is an essential part of being a socially responsible business. By promoting healthier lifestyles, offering nutritious products, and addressing public health challenges, companies can make a meaningful difference in people's lives. These efforts are going to improve community well-being and also help strengthen relationships with stakeholders and align with bigger sustainability goals.

Another impactful way businesses can support local communities is by sourcing raw materials from nearby suppliers. This approach helps the environment by reducing transportation distances, which means fewer emissions and lower logistics costs. At the same time, it boosts the local economy by creating jobs and supporting small businesses. Additionally, it makes supply chains more resilient and contributes to food security in the region.





A focus on Scope 3 emissions, particularly those originating from agriculture, land use practices, and livestock, can further enhance sustainability efforts. Overall, by addressing the estimated 90% of emissions attributed to Scope 3, companies can make significant strides toward achieving their climate goals while supporting the UAE's broader sustainability agenda. Incorporating Scope 3 emissions into sustainability strategies provides a clearer understanding of a company's overall carbon footprint, enabling targeted interventions to reduce it.

Tools and frameworks for Scope 3 accounting are becoming increasingly accessible, allowing businesses to take meaningful steps in mitigating their indirect emissions. By doing so, companies not only demonstrate leadership in climate action but also align with the growing expectations of consumers, investors, and regulatory bodies.

These best practices collectively represent a roadmap for food companies to enhance their sustainability efforts, reduce environmental impacts, and contribute to broader societal and economic goals. By implementing these strategies, businesses can position themselves as pioneers in the transition toward a sustainable and responsible food industry.





## Conclusion and Future Outlook

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Food companies are uniquely positioned to lead the global transition toward sustainability and innovation. By aligning their operations with strategic frameworks such as the UAE Circular Economy Policy 2021–2031 and the UAE Net Zero 2050 Strategic Initiative, these companies can address pressing environmental and societal challenges while maintaining economic profitability.

The shift toward sustainable practices not only enhances corporate resilience but also underscores the role of the private sector in driving national and global sustainability agendas. One of the key areas for future progress lies in the adoption and expansion of renewable energy within operations.

By integrating solar, wind, and bioenergy solutions, companies can significantly reduce their carbon footprint, contributing to the broader goal of decarbonisation. This transition to clean energy reflects a commitment to long-term environmental stewardship, aligning with both local and international climate goals.

Building a resilient supply chain is another critical step. Food companies have the potential to innovate product lines that prioritise health and sustainability, catering to an increasingly aware consumer base. The development of fortified and plant-based foods addresses both nutritional needs and environmental concerns, offering solutions that align with evolving market demands and sustainable development objectives. Partnerships and collaborations across industries offer an opportunity to scale impact.

By leveraging expertise and resources through strategic alliances, companies can accelerate the adoption of best practices, enhance waste management systems, and drive innovation in packaging and production processes. Such collaborations also facilitate knowledge sharing, enabling businesses to collectively address shared challenges and capitalise on emerging opportunities.



Hyper-local production emerges as a practical and impactful strategy for reducing emissions and transportation costs. By producing goods closer to end consumers, companies not only decrease logistical complexities but also enhance delivery efficiency. This approach also fosters stronger ties with local communities, supporting regional economies and reducing environmental impacts associated with long-distance transportation.

Sustainable finance represents a pivotal avenue for driving investment in environmentally friendly technologies. Food companies can tap into green bonds and other sustainable financing mechanisms to fund initiatives aimed at reducing their ecological footprint. These financial instruments offer an opportunity to secure funding at lower interest rates while demonstrating a commitment to sustainability, appealing to both investors and stakeholders.

The adoption of advanced technologies will play a crucial role in enhancing resource efficiency and minimising environmental impacts. Innovations in automation, artificial intelligence, and blockchain can streamline processes, reduce waste, and improve transparency across the supply chain. By embracing these technologies, food companies can position themselves as leaders in the transition to a sustainable future.

Through these measures, the food industry can address its environmental and societal responsibilities, ensuring long-term growth and resilience. This journey toward sustainability is not only a necessity but also an opportunity for food companies to redefine their role in creating a sustainable and innovative global economy.







# National Policies and Strategies in Focus

## The UAE's Net Zero 2050 Strategic Initiative

This strategy is the nation's commitment to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, making it the first country in the Middle East to set such a goal. The mission is to drive sustainable economic growth while addressing climate change.

## We the UAE 2031

'National vision and strategy aimed at enhancing the UAE's global competitiveness and ensuring sustainable development over the next decade. Launched in 2022, its mission is to solidify the UAE's position as a leading nation by 2031 through a focus on four main pillars: economy, society, diplomacy, and education.

## UAE Centennial 2071

Long-term vision aimed at making the UAE one of the best countries in the world by 2071, coinciding with the nation's 100th anniversary. Its mission is to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for generations to come by focusing on four key pillars: Future-focused government, Excellent education, A diversified knowledge economy, A happy and cohesive society.

## UAE Energy Strategy 2050

This energy strategy seeks to triple the share of renewable energy in the nation's energy mix and invest AED 150 to AED 200 billion by 2030 to meet the rising energy demands of its rapidly growing economy. In light of dynamic changes in the energy sector, advancements in low-emission energy technologies, and the UAE's commitment to the Paris Agreement, the strategy has been updated. It now includes specific targets for 2030 and long-term ambitions for 2050 aimed at achieving net-zero emissions.

## The UAE's Green Agenda 2030

Strategic plan aimed at fostering sustainable development and transitioning to an eco-friendly economy. It seeks to boost GDP by 4–5%, increase exports by AED 24–25 billion, and reduce energy emissions to under 100 kilowatt-hours. Centred around five objectives: building a competitive knowledge economy, enhancing the quality of life, preserving natural resources, advancing clean energy and climate action, and promoting sustainable lifestyles.





# Profiles of Companies Included in the Research

To understand how food companies contribute to sustainability and economic diversification in the UAE, the 2022 and 2023 sustainability and integrated reports of key stakeholders, including United Foods Company (UFC), Agthia, Almarai, BRF, and IFFCO, were reviewed. These companies were selected for their significant market presence and notable sustainable initiatives, ensuring a comprehensive representation of practices. Criteria included greenhouse gas emission reductions, water conservation, waste management, community participation, local production investments, and sustainable packaging innovations.

## United Foods Company

Founded in 1976, is a leading producer of high-quality oils, fats, and spreads, including popular brands like Aseel, Mumtaz, and Nawar. Based in Dubai, the company serves over 65 countries, focusing on sustainability, innovation, and community support to deliver quality products while building a healthier future.

## IFFCO

Global leader in food, beauty, and agriculture, operating in 50 countries with over 15,000 employees and 80+ brands. The company focuses on innovation, sustainability, and responsible sourcing, delivering high-quality products. Through its diverse portfolio, drives positive environmental and social impact while meeting global customer needs.

## Agthia

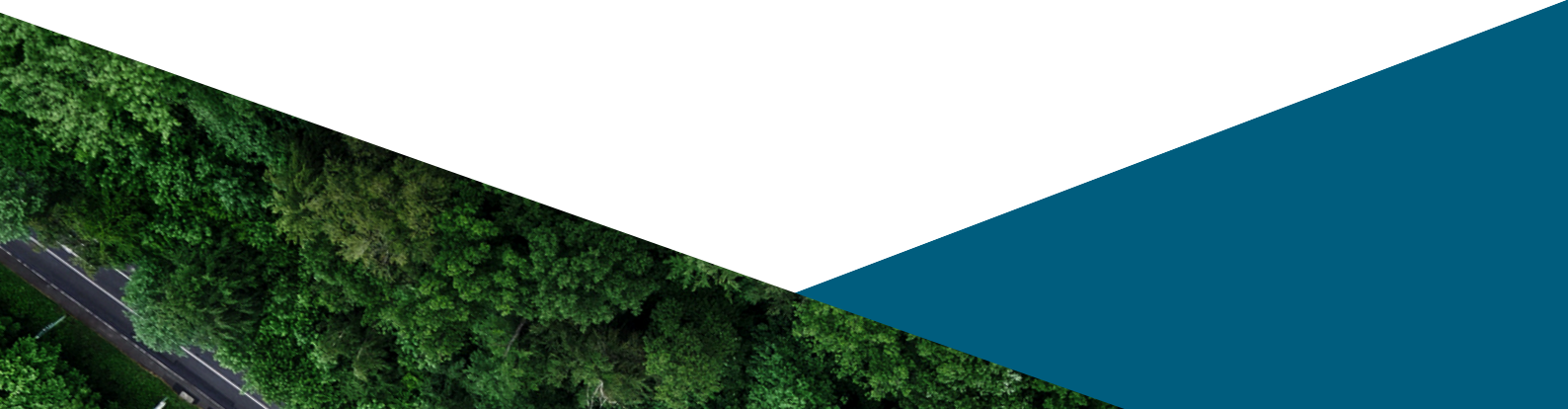
Leading UAE-based food and beverage company with operations across the Middle East, North Africa, and other global markets. Specializing in water, flour, animal feed, frozen protein, and snacks, Company 3 manages 35+ brands in over 45 markets. Committed to innovation and sustainability, it aims to be a regional F&B leader by 2025, focusing on quality and responsible growth.

## Almarai

Saudi-based leader in dairy, juice, bakery, poultry, and infant nutrition, with strong presence in the UAE and serving over 42 million consumers daily across the GCC. Recognized as the largest vertically integrated dairy company globally, focuses on sustainability, innovation, and producing high-quality, nutritious products while supporting Saudi Policy 2030.

## BRF

Global leader in food, produces fresh meats, processed foods, and snacks, operating in 127+ countries with brands like Sadia, Perdigão, and Qualy. Based in Brazil, it emphasizes sustainability, animal welfare, and innovation, supported by 9,500 integrated producers and nearly 100,000 employees worldwide.





# Methodology details

## The scope of the study

This paper examines prominent food companies operating primarily in the UAE and MENA region. The analysis highlights how food companies are aligning their business operations with UAE government strategies, like UAE Vision 2030, and other visions, in order to boost food security and also, at the same time, reduce their environmental impact.

## Purpose of the study

The aim of this paper is to examine the current trends shaping the food sector and explore how companies are addressing key challenges, including regulatory, environmental, and supply chain issues. It also highlights the strategies these companies are implementing to enhance food security in the region while aligning their operations with UAE government initiatives such as the UAE Net Zero 2050 strategy and the UAE Circular Economy Policy. The data used in this paper has been taken from publicly available platforms like companies sustainability and integrated reports and government websites for policy and vision statements.

## Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria in the Analysis

Companies included in this paper are based on specific criteria: their scale and influence in the global or regional market, active integration of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles, alignment with recognised frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), transparency in reporting, and adoption of innovative solutions such as renewable energy, sustainable sourcing, and waste reduction. We selected the companies considering their sustainability and integrated reports for 2022 and 2023.

## Limitations

The study faced certain limitations, such as reliance on publicly disclosed data.



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