Green Packaging as a Marketing Tool for Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Agricultural Sector: Stonyfield Farm as Model

Mabrouk Khalil Oussama, SDSAT Lab, University Of Ain Temouchent (Algeria),
khalil.mabrouk@univ-temouchent.edu.dz

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Abstract:

This study explores green packaging as a marketing tool for agricultural products, using StonyField Farm as a model. The research found that green packaging differentiates the market, builds trust, and promotes cost efficiency.

The study reveals that green packaging by a company can gain a competitive edge in the agricultural market by fostering trust, cost efficiency, and regulatory compliance, and suggests recommendations for Algerian enterprises and policymakers.

Keywords: Green packaging; Competitive advantage; Stony Field Farm.
Jel Classification Codes: M31; Q56.

1. INTRODUCTION

The agricultural industry has historically been among the most resource-demanding sectors, significantly contributing to ecological degradation through the production of waste and the utilization of non-biodegradable substances. As global cognizance of environmental challenges escalates, agricultural enterprises face mounting pressure to integrate sustainable methodologies.

Concurrently, the convergence of ecological considerations and marketing strategies has facilitated the rise of green marketing, a potentially transformative business paradigm centered on the creation and promotion of environmentally sustainable products and services. This innovative marketing approach offers unprecedented opportunities for societal progress, enhancement of environmental accountability, and economic development.

Consequently, green packaging can function as a strategic mechanism for achieving competitive superiority within the agricultural domain, particularly as global awareness of environmental challenges intensifies. This initiative has inspired numerous exemplary international practices in this area.

Nevertheless, Algeria, regrettably, experiences a deficiency in scholarly exploration in this arena, particularly concerning the employment of materials and processes that are ecologically sustainable, such as biodegradable, recyclable, or reusable packaging, in securing competitive advantage for enterprises within the agricultural sector. Therefore, to address this research gap,

The following inquiry may aid in identifying the study's central issue:

How green packaging support the establishment of a competitive advantage for firms in the agricultural sector?

Based on the aforementioned, the sub-questions were:

1- What is the concept of green packaging?

2- What is the concept of competitive advantage?

3- How did Stonyfield's green packaging promote the achievement of a competitive advantage in the agricultural sector?

The relevance of the research:

The investigation accentuates the escalating significance of sustainability within contemporary agriculture. As environmental issues become increasingly pronounced on a global scale, eco-friendly packaging presents agricultural enterprises with an opportunity to mitigate their ecological impact and engage in sustainable practices, which are essential for enduring environmental well-being.

Furthermore, the study elucidates how the implementation of eco-friendly packaging can serve as a distinguishing factor for companies in the competitive landscape. By prioritizing sustainable packaging solutions, businesses can bolster their brand reputation, attract environmentally conscious consumers, and adhere to evolving regulatory frameworks, ultimately securing a competitive advantage over their competitors.

Finally, recognizing that eco-friendly packaging represents a worldwide trend, the research is pertinent not only to Algeria but also possesses extensive applicability to international markets. It provides a conceptual framework for agricultural businesses globally to comprehend the strategic advantages of sustainability in packaging.

Research Objectives:

We seek through this study to determine the following**:**

1- Clarify the concept of green packaging.
2- Clarify the concept of competitive advantage.
3- Elucidate the contribution of green packaging to the establishment of a competitive advantage in the agricultural sector.
4- Point out Stonyfield’s successful experience in adopting green packaging for gaining competitive advantage, thereby providing valuable insights for Algerian enterprises to emulate and integrate similar practices.

2. Literary Review

2.1 Definition of Green marketing

As is frequently the case with topics that have a broad scope and an interdisciplinary approach, we can conclude that there is no universally agreed-upon definition of green marketing. The attempt to define the concept and its components' idea and meaning is supported by a number of authors and institutions. Because of this, some are focusing on how this differs from traditional marketing, while others apply the fundamental ideas of sustainable development.

According to Polonsky, green marketing is a collection of actions meant to create and enable any exchange meant to satiate human needs or desires with the least amount of adverse effects on the environment(Polonsky, 2008, p. 10).

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), Green Marketing can be defined in three different ways:

- ✓ Firstly, green marketing refers to the promotion of goods that are thought to be safe for the environment..
- ✓ Second, Green Marketing is the development of products designed to minimize the negative effects on the physical environment or to improve its quality.
- ✓ Third, green marketing refers to the initiatives taken by companies to create, market, package, and reclaim goods in a way that is environmentally conscious. (Líšková, Cudlínová, Pártlová, & Petr, 2016).

The definition of this concept can be summarized as replacing traditional marketing activities with modern and innovative marketing activities based on an environmentally friendly foundation that reduces waste of resources (amraoui, djemaa, & kaouache, 2018).

According to this viewpoint, the concept's scope extends beyond the extracurricular activities businesses engage in as a way of giving back to the community and improving their reputation in the marketplace. It also encompasses the integration of green environmental aspects into the business's overall strategic direction, which aims to reduce pollution, provide environmentally friendly products and services, and generate sufficient revenue and profits.

2.2 Green Packaging

Green product packaging refers to environmentally friendly packaging solutions that aim to reduce waste, promote sustainability, and minimize the negative impact on the environment(Rajesh & Subhashini, 2021). It involves the use of recyclable, biodegradable materials, and energy-efficient manufacturing processes to create packaging that is both durable and eco-friendly(Yuan, 2022). Green packaging plays a crucial role in protecting products, preventing waste accumulation, and promoting efficient business practices while reducing carbon footprints and promoting corporate social responsibility(Alam & Abunar, 2023). By adopting green packaging practices, businesses can contribute to environmental sustainability by minimizing resource consumption, waste generation and carbon emissions throughout the entire life cycle of the product. Ultimately, green product packaging aims protect the product to meet consumer needs while ensuring a cleaner environment for future generations.

2.3 Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage refers to the attributes or capabilities that enable an organization to outperform its competitors, leading to superior performance and profitability(Hana, 2013). A competitive advantage is achieved by offering customers greater value through lower prices or additional benefits, leading to increased profit and long-term sustainability in niche marketing ventures(Tallman, Jenkins, Henry, & Pinch, 2004). This concept is multifaceted, encompassing various factors that contribute to a firm's ability to maintain an edge in the market. Achieving competitive advantage is essential for maximizing profits and ensuring long-term success in a rapidly changing business environment(Barney, 1995, p. 49). While competitive advantage is vital for success, it is also important to recognize that it can be transient. Companies must continuously innovate and adapt to maintain their competitive edge in an ever-evolving market landscape(Fatonah, 2023).

2.4 Michael Porter Sources of Competitive Advantage

Michael Porter identifies several key sources of competitive advantage that

organizations can leverage to outperform their rivals. His framework primarily revolves around three generic strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus(Porter, 2008).

- ✓ **Cost Leadership:** Companies can achieve competitive advantage by being the lowest-cost producer in their industry, allowing them to offer lower prices or achieve higher margins, This strategy has shown strong predictive value for competitive advantage, particularly in sectors like banking(Ali & Anwar, 2021, p. 42).
- ✓ **Differentiation:** Differentiation involves offering unique products or services that command a premium price, which has garnered significant attention among businesses, While effective, its impact on competitive advantage is generally weaker compared to cost leadership(Thodkar, 2019).
- ✓ **Focus Strategy:** The focus strategy targets a specific market segment, allowing firms to cater to niche markets effectively(Ali & Anwar, 2021).

3. Study Case: Stonyfield

3.1 Stonyfield Farm

Stonyfield Farm, Inc., also known as Stonyfield, is a Londonderry, New Hampshire-based organic yogurt producer. Established in 1983 at Stonyfield Farm in United States, the company initiated operations by utilizing a herd of seven jersey cows to create organic milk. This milk was subsequently transformed on-site into organic yogurt according to the original recipe of the founder, Samuel Kaymen. In its inaugural year, Stonyfield generated sales amounting to $56,000. By 2010, Stonyfield had ascended to become the top-selling organic yogurt label in the United States and the third-largest yogurt brand globally, amassing over $375 million in revenue and surpassing the industry's average profitability(Stonyfield, 2024).

Stonyfield Farm currently commands a market share of around 3.3 percent in the United States yogurt market and sells its products in all 50 states and Canada. Ranking as the fourth largest branded yogurt in the U.S., Stonyfield Farm's product line consists of a variety of offerings, with

approximately 35 percent of its total production being certified organic. This distinguishes the company as the primary producer of organic yogurt nationwide. The range of products includes nonfat refrigerated yogurt, as well as low-fat and full-fat organic yogurt, and organic ice cream. Recently introduced items comprise a children's line such as Planet Protector Low-Fat Yogurt, Yo-Baby, and Yo-Squeeze.

Table 1. Stonyfield Green Marketing Strategies Results

Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from transportation between 2006 and 2011 (resulted in avoided costs totaling $14.7 million).	**Savings amounting to dollars resulted from a 17% decrease in facility energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions between 2007 and 2011.**	**Percentage of renewable (bio-based) packaging used as of end of 2011**	**Millions saved by preventing waste plastic through packaging reductions**
34%	**2.6**	**70%**	**6.1**

The source :(purestrategies, 2024).

3.2 Stonyfield's Green Packaging

To commence, let us address the fundamentals. The novel container developed by Stonyfield — currently utilized in its multipack Yo-Baby line as well as several other products — substitutes polystyrene with a bioplastic known as polylactic acid, or PLA. In essence, this material is derived from corn(Makower, 2024).

This may not be the inaugural transformation in yogurt container design, nor the first instance of packaging innovation derived from corn. Nevertheless, the trajectory of Stonyfield to its current state serves as an exemplary illustration of sustainability, innovation, perseverance, and systems thinking that merits dissemination.

The production of PLA occurs at NatureWorks in Nebraska, a subsidiary of Cargill, and is subsequently dispatched to Clear Lam Packaging in Illinois. There, it undergoes mixing with colorants and various additives before being transformed into rolls of plastic, which are then molded into cups at the Stonyfield Yogurt Works. This innovative

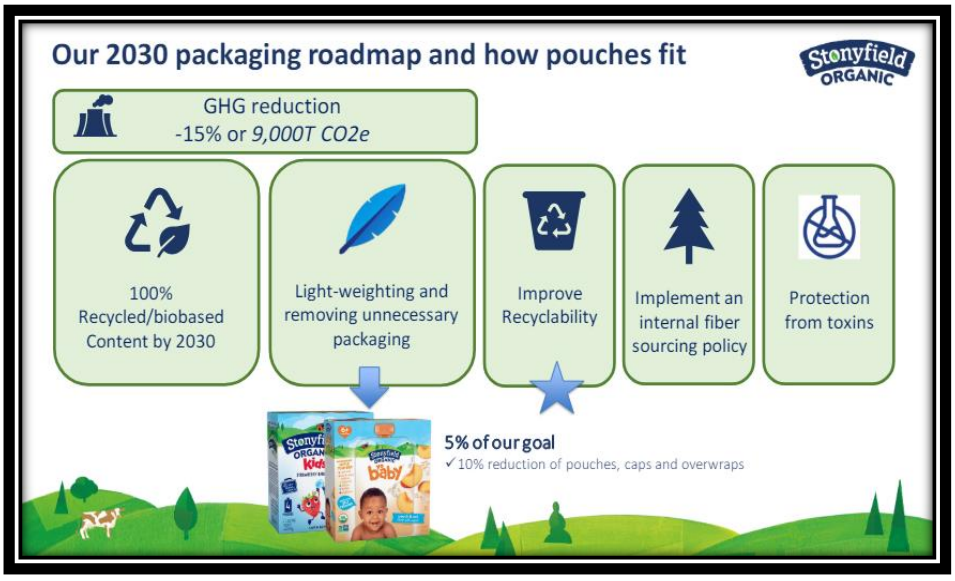
packaging is composed of 93 percent plant-based materials, with the remaining components consisting of nontoxic colorants and additives(CHEERCircle™, 2024).

These cups present numerous benefits. Besides the evident advantage of replacing petroleum-based materials with plant-based alternatives, PLA necessitates less energy and emits a reduced quantity of greenhouse gases throughout its entire lifecycle compared to polystyrene.

Considering that PLA is derived from corn, which sequesters carbon during its growth, the use of PLA results in a 48 percent decrease in carbon emissions relative to polystyrene from production to disposal. For Stonyfield's production of approximately 200 million cups, this equates to a reduction in its carbon footprint by 1,875 metric tons annually. This figure is significant, given that packaging constitutes Stonyfield's second-largest source of carbon emissions, following livestock(purestrategies, 2024).

Furthermore, the new packaging exhibits greater durability than the petroleum-based plastic it supersedes, and provides additional performance benefits. For instance, it diminishes breakage during transportation and establishes a more secure seal with the lid. The enhanced strength of the plastic compared to polystyrene permits a reduction in the quantity required, thereby rendering the packages lighter.

Fig.1. Stonyfield Green Packaging Roadmap



The source :**(Nedairyinnovation, 2024)**

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4. Methods and Materials

The researcher used the descriptive method, as it relies on describing the research variables and exploring the role of green packaging in achieving competitive advantage for firms in the agricultural sector. A case study is employed to elucidate the experiences of Stonyfield Farm regarding the utilization of sustainable packaging as a means to attain competitive advantage, thereby providing insights that may assist Algerian enterprises in establishing leadership within the African market.

Data is collected from websites, academic articles and other available references, to comprehensively cover the subject matter, the remainder of this paper is divided into the following sections: (I) introduction; (II) Literary review; (III) Study case: Stonyfield farm; (IV) Methods and Materials; (V) Results and discussion; (VI) Conclusion.

5. Results and Discussion

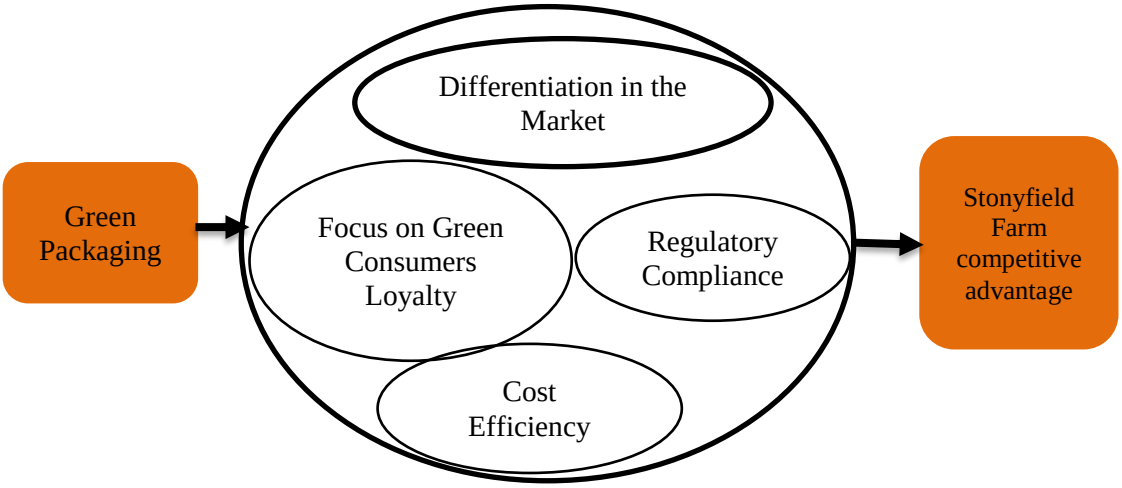
1. Green packaging as a source for Stonyfield farm competitive advantage:

The strategic implementation of environmentally conscious packaging solutions endows businesses with a substantial competitive edge, as it not only enhances brand perception in the market but also attracts consumers who emphasize ecological sustainability, concurrently achieving a reduction in operational costs, adhering to relevant regulatory frameworks, and cultivating an innovative atmosphere within the organization. In light of the fact that as consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability in their purchasing decisions, the strategic adoption of green packaging methodologies can effectively enable companies to set themselves apart from their competitors, thereby paving the way for sustained success over the long term as shown in Figure(2).

The implementation of environmentally sustainable packaging strategies has afforded Stonyfield Farm a noteworthy competitive edge. Which is manifested through the profound reinforcement of its core brand

values and the effective differentiation of its product offerings in an increasingly crowded market landscape. In addition to the cultivation of enduring consumer loyalty, the assurance of compliance with existing regulatory frameworks and the significant enhancement of its corporate reputation, as well as the optimization of its supply chain operations which collectively contribute to its overall business efficacy. These multifaceted advantages have been instrumental in facilitating Stonyfield's sustained prominence within the organic dairy sector, thereby enabling the company to effectively cater to and resonate with a rapidly expanding demographic of environmentally conscious consumers who prioritize sustainability in their purchasing decisions.

Fig.2. Green Packaging as a source for Stonyfield farm Competitive Advantage



Source: Prepared by the Researcher

1.1 Differentiation in the Market

In the highly competitive landscape of the organic dairy sector, the strategic implementation of environmentally-friendly packaging by Stonyfield Farm serves as a distinguishing factor that effectively sets its product offerings apart from those of rival companies that might not place a significant emphasis on sustainable practices and materials. This innovative approach to packaging not only enhances the visibility of the brand on retail shelves, but it also resonates profoundly with a growing demographic of consumers who are increasingly attuned to ecological issues and prioritize

purchasing decisions that reflect their commitment to environmental stewardship. Consequently, Stonyfield Farm has successfully cultivated a unique market presence that not only enhances brand recognition but also fosters a loyal customer base that values sustainability as a core principle in their consumer behavior.

The environmentally conscious packaging used by Stonyfield, in conjunction with its commitment to offering organic products, enables the company to effectively establish itself as a brand that is perceived as premium and of higher quality in the competitive marketplace. This positioning resonates deeply with consumers, who are frequently inclined to invest extra financial resources in products that not only meet their needs but also reflect their personal values, especially in relation to critical issues such as sustainability and environmental responsibility. Consequently, this alignment between consumer values and product offerings plays a significant role in influencing purchasing behaviors, leading individuals to prioritize and support brands that demonstrate a genuine commitment to ecological stewardship and organic integrity.

1.2 Cost Efficiency

Stonyfield's unwavering commitment to the principles of environmentally responsible packaging has facilitated the establishment of collaborative partnerships with suppliers who espouse similar ecological values, thereby contributing to the development of a more sustainable and ethically-minded supply chain. The ramifications of this initiative extend beyond merely augmenting the company's sustainability credentials, as it may also yield significant cost efficiencies that can be realized and accumulated over time, thereby enhancing overall financial performance.

In an impressive demonstration of strategic foresight, Stonyfield has successfully navigated the complexities of sustainability by meticulously optimizing packaging designs to minimize the use of materials while simultaneously enhancing shipping efficiency, a dual approach that has the potential to reduce expenses across the board. Noteworthy advancements in packaging improvements, coupled with the implementation of sophisticated

software that governs maximum truck speeds, culminated in a remarkable 46 percent absolute reduction in greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation from the year 2016 through to 2020, while also resulting in a substantial financial savings of $7.6 million. Additionally, enhancements to packaging design, which included innovative redesign processes, led to the elimination of eighteen tractor-trailer loads of plastic waste annually, thereby underscoring the company's commitment to sustainability. In further efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions whenever feasible, Stonyfield has adopted a transportation strategy that prioritizes shipping via train, an environmentally-friendly alternative that significantly contributes to reducing the carbon footprint of its logistics operations(Gittell, Magnusson, & Merenda, 2012).

In a similar vein, Lafarge's ambitious zero waste initiative has inspired the organization to diligently adhere to the four fundamental principles of waste reduction, namely: Redesign, Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle, which collectively resulted in an impressive 39 percent decrease in solid waste production between the years 2017 and 2020, alongside generating annual savings amounting to $450,000. Furthermore, the strategic redesign of packaging, which has incorporated materials derived from plant sources and eco-friendly substances, has facilitated an extraordinary annual cost reduction of $3.2 million, thereby illustrating the financial viability of sustainable practices in the corporate sector(Saylordotorg, 2024).

1.3 Consumer Loyalty

By actively engaging in sustainable practices and making a firm commitment to environmental stewardship, companies are able to cultivate a profound sense of trust and foster unwavering loyalty among consumers who are increasingly aware of and concerned about ecological issues(Koller, Floh, & Zauner, 2011). This strategic alignment with eco-conscious values not only enhances the firm's reputation but also significantly contributes to long-term customer retention, while simultaneously promoting organic word-of-mouth referrals that can amplify the brand's visibility in an increasingly competitive marketplace(Sari & Astuti, 2021).

The establishment of brand loyalty can be exemplified by Stonyfield's unwavering dedication to utilizing environmentally friendly packaging, which has been instrumental in the creation of a devoted customer base that feels a deep connection to the brand. Consumers who prioritize environmental sustainability are inherently more inclined to remain loyal to a brand that authentically embodies their values and beliefs, thereby leading to a notable increase in customer retention rates that can be beneficial for the firm in the long run(Nataliya & Nuvriasari, 2023).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of word-of-mouth marketing is significantly enhanced when satisfied customers, who genuinely appreciate and resonate with Stonyfield's environmental initiatives, take it upon themselves to advocate for the brand among their social circles and networks. This organic and genuine form of marketing not only serves to establish a positive feedback loop but also contributes to the fortification of the brand's competitive position within the marketplace, as each recommendation further solidifies the trust and credibility that consumers associate with Stonyfield's commitment to sustainability(Sari & Astuti, 2021).

1.4 Regulatory Compliance

Numerous geographical regions across the globe are increasingly implementing more stringent regulations and standards concerning the management of packaging waste and the promotion of sustainability practices. The utilization of green packaging materials not only ensures adherence to the current legal frameworks but also prepares businesses for prospective regulations, thereby significantly diminishing the likelihood of incurring fines or other punitive measures. By integrating green packaging solutions into their operations, firms can proactively navigate the evolving landscape of regulatory demands and market dynamics, thus strategically positioning themselves as frontrunners in the realm of sustainability and environmental stewardship(Wang, Elahi, Zhou, Wang, & Zhang, 2022).

In a commendable display of foresight, Stonyfield Farm has embraced a proactive strategy by adopting green packaging solutions well in advance

of anticipated regulatory shifts related to packaging waste and sustainability practices. This forward-thinking approach effectively minimizes the potential risks associated with future non-compliance, such as fines or penalties, while simultaneously establishing the brand as a prominent leader within its industry, recognized for its commitment to environmentally responsible practices.

Stonyfield's unwavering dedication to green packaging not only enhances its brand reputation but also serves as a crucial mechanism for future-proofing the organization against the backdrop of increasingly rigorous environmental regulations, thereby ensuring sustained access to market opportunities and enhanced operational efficiency in an ever-evolving marketplace.

4. CONCLUSION

Through this paper, we diligently sought to investigate and elucidate the profound importance of green packaging, which serves as a formidable instrument for corporations striving to secure a competitive edge within the organic agriculture sector. by significantly augmenting their brand image as well as mitigating operational costs, adhering to regulatory requirements, and catering to the preferences of environmentally conscious consumers who are increasingly influencing market trends.

Through an extensive review of existing literature alongside a comprehensive case study focused on the successful implementation of green packaging strategies. this research underscores the dual role of such environmentally friendly packaging, which not only fulfills ethical and ecological responsibilities but also functions as a tactical mechanism through which firms can achieve market dominance in the progressively competitive landscape of the agricultural industry. Moreover, considering. Algeria's growing propensity to adopt innovative institutional frameworks as a new economic model aimed at achieving sustainable growth by diversifying its economic activities beyond the traditionally dominant hydrocarbon sector. our findings indicate that green packaging has emerged as a viable solution for businesses aiming to establish leadership in the

agricultural market; to substantiate this assertion, we utilized Stonyfield Farm as a paradigmatic example that Algerian firms could emulate to enhance their competitive position, particularly within the African marketplace.

Our research was based on the collection of data and statistics regarding Stonyfield farm, which was obtained from various sources such as literature, Stonyfield website.

Finally, the key findings attained through this study, alongside the suggestions that can be implemented to advance Algeria's agriculture sector, can be succinctly outlined as follows:

Findings:

- The implementation of green packaging significantly bolsters a firm's brand reputation, especially in industries where environmental sustainability is paramount. Organizations utilizing eco-friendly packaging are often viewed as more responsible, fostering greater consumer trust and loyalty.

- While green packaging may incur higher initial expenses, it can culminate in substantial long-term financial benefits. By minimizing material consumption, decreasing transportation costs due to lighter packaging, and lowering waste management expenditures, firms can achieve improved cost efficiency. Investments in sustainable packaging solutions ultimately enhance profitability over time.

- Embracing green packaging positions firms to comply with increasingly rigorous environmental regulations. Adherence to both current and forthcoming regulations aids in evading penalties, mitigating supply chain risks, and bolstering the company's reputation as a compliant and innovative entity.

- Green packaging acts as a critical differentiator in competitive landscapes. Businesses adopting sustainable practices can distinguish themselves amidst rising consumer demand for eco-friendly products, potentially leading to enhanced market share and competitive superiority.

- Stonyfield Farm serves as a prominent and exemplary case study

within the realm of sustainable business practices, wherein the utilization of eco-friendly packaging strategies has been effectively harnessed to not only enhance their brand image but also to secure a significant competitive edge within an increasingly environmentally conscious marketplace.

Recommendations:

- Providing tax relief and administrative facilities for businesses that had successfully conveyed their commitment to sustainability by adopting green packaging strategies in the agricultural sector.

- The government ought to extend guidance and assistance to enterprises aspiring to penetrate global markets where sustainable packaging is a fundamental prerequisite. Ensuring that Algerian agricultural products comply with international environmental packaging standards can facilitate the emergence of new export avenues.

- Initiate programs that assist agricultural enterprises in forming connections with suppliers of sustainable packaging materials. This may involve the development of online platforms or networks that streamline the process for enterprises to procure eco-friendly materials within the domestic market.

- Establish or bolster industry associations dedicated to sustainability in agriculture, which can serve as a forum for the exchange of best practices, resources, and technologies pertinent to green packaging.

- For enterprises intending to export, sustainable packaging provides a crucial competitive advantage in markets characterized by stringent environmental regulations. Highlighting the sustainability of packaging in international marketing strategies can significantly enhance the attractiveness of Algerian agricultural products in foreign markets.

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