



Wal-Mart Makes a Splash With Kids

BENTONVILLE, Ark. - Wal-Mart teamed up with trading partners and Project WET to sponsor a kid-focused water sustainability education program. The Sustainability 360 Festival was scheduled to take place here last Friday.

The program's objective is to teach fourth graders about the importance of water quality, pollution prevention, the water cycle, and water use and management, according to Stephanie Kaleva, director of communications for Project WET, a nonprofit water education program for teachers. Nestlé Waters North America, Del Monte, General Mills, Cargill and Johnson Diversey were among its supplier sponsors.

"Sustainability and conservation are at the core of our environmental goals, so this festival was a good fit for us," Wal-Mart spokeswoman Tara Raddohl told SN.

The idea for the event was born out of a discussion involving members of Wal-Mart's land and agriculture network, said Kevin Mathews, director of environmental affairs for Nestlé Waters.

Along with donating products for the festival, several of the sponsor companies also provided volunteers for the event.

Representatives from Wal-Mart, Nestlé Waters and Cargill engaged in a four-hour training session in February to prepare for interacting with the students through games and other forms of educational entertainment.

The Arkansas Natural Resource Conservation Service also sent volunteers for training. Del Monte, Johnson Diversey, the U.S. Geological Survey and General Mills sent representatives to the festival.

"General Mills is providing volunteers and speakers for the event," said Alex Cornett, a field sales director with the company. "We are committed to managing water use responsibly here at General Mills and are constantly looking for ways to decrease our own water consumption."

Many of the food makers participating in the water festival have taken their commitment to protecting the environment to a higher level.

Nestlé Waters, for instance, has found ways to incorporate water

sustainability into its processing facilities, Mathews said.

"We are using a tool within our facilities that effectively reduces the amount of water we use to produce our spring water," he told SN. Nestlé's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified plants have conserved more than 9 million gallons of water since 2002.

Del Monte has taken measures to temper its impact on the environment as well. The company increased the amount of organic matter in the soil of the fields where its products are grown in order to reduce the contaminants that seep into ground water. The canned produce maker has also revamped the irrigation methods used on its farms to consume less water overall.

While not involved with the Sustainability 360 Festival, the Campbell Soup Co. has also made strides in reducing its water consumption.

From 1995 to 2005, the food maker was able to reduce its use of water - its single largest ingredient by volume - by 15%, according to Doug Conant, president and chief executive officer of Campbell's.

"Most companies, including suppliers and retailers and many other types of businesses, have a vested interest in water conservation and sustainability, and it's encouraging to see so many of them taking steps to make a difference," said Mathews.

by Kelly Gates

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