



Building a Sustainable World: Career Interview

with Petra Psenicka, Environmental Sustainability Manager at Muller UK&I

How did your career lead you to the position you hold today?

I've always been passionate about the environment and sustainability. So when I had the opportunity to study for a Master's degree in Environmental Management for business at Cranfield University as part of a double degree programme, I went for it. After I finished my studies, I applied for a graduate programme at a potato processing company. My first role was the Group Environmental Coordinator, and it was an excellent opportunity for me to turn what I learned into practice. I was lucky to have a great manager who wasn't afraid to task me with developing a five-year sustainability strategy. It was a big challenge, and I wasn't confident at all, but she was very supportive and helped me to get out of my comfort zone and develop the 5-year plan. Unfortunately, the site where I was based got closed and the company restructured, so my role was made redundant.

I started a new position in a non-profit organisation, Groundwork, where I conducted audits, delivered training, etc. Again, I was fortunate to have a fantastic team to work with. My colleague with decades of experience was a brilliant mentor and my manager pushed me out of my comfort zone just like the previous one. She believed I was

skilled enough to be appointed as an interim Environment Manager at Birmingham City University as part of the consultancy work Groundwork did for them. It was an amazing experience. It also made me realise that if I wanted to progress in my career, having a master's degree was not enough. Therefore, I decided to upgrade my



IEMA membership to a Practitioner. Then, an opportunity came to be the Environment/Sustainability Manager at Muller, where I'm currently working.

What does your role at your organisation entail?

I'm a member of a central team. My tasks involve developing/delivering and embedding strategy and supporting tools, educating employees, and raising awareness about sustainability. I also support site teams with external and internal auditing and ensure they comply with legislation, standards and customers' requirements.

What is the most exciting part of your job?

The variety. I wouldn't be able to do just a routine job. Sustainability and environmental management are complex fields. I love working with different people, getting them engaged and working together on various projects. Getting people excited about sustainability and seeing the company reduce the impact on the environment is heartwarming.

What is your biggest achievement to date?

It isn't easy to decide which of my achievements was the biggest. Each role brought different challenges, and my achievements had different impacts. However, if I think about the most recent one, it would be Sustainability Roadshows.

We launched a new sustainability action plan last September and were thinking about the best way to introduce it to our employees and get them involved. We wanted to do something special. So, my colleague and I came up with the idea of doing a roadshow. With help and support from other teams within our business, we turned it into reality. We prepared and delivered the event to every dairy site. Our colleagues had the opportunity to find out more about our three pillars through fun and interactive games and talks. We were able to engage with more

than 65% of all colleagues, talking about our sustainability ambitions, what everybody's role is, and how we can get on the journey together. It was a big success. We received positive feedback from site teams and directors. I was really proud of how it all turned out.

What was the most exciting project that you worked on?

One of the most exciting projects I worked on was as an interim Environment Manager at Birmingham City University. It was part of my consultancy role, and I truly enjoyed the distinct purpose compared to corporate settings. The focus wasn't solely on cost reduction and profit generation but on implementing impactful environmental improvements and minimising negative impact. I was involved in developing a sustainable procurement policy and helped the university choose a catering company that sourced local, seasonal ingredients and minimised food waste. It wasn't the cheapest option, but the most sustainable one. In addition to the sustainable procurement policy, I organised awareness campaigns on sustainable travel, ethical trade and food waste. The engagement events drew in a significant number of students and employees. The collaborative spirit and commitment to sustainability throughout the university truly resonated with my values.

What is the most frustrating part of your job?

It can be frustrating to navigate the corporate landscape, where sustainability sometimes feels pushed aside. Short-term profits often take priority, and convincing decision-makers of the long-term benefits and potential risks of

inaction can be an uphill battle. On the other hand, I have to admit it's getting better. Companies are now more open to longer ROIs, and sustainability has climbed up on their priority list.

If you had the opportunity to change one thing that would make your job easier, what would you change?

Approval processes. Simplifying them for sustainable initiatives would eliminate unnecessary roadblocks and delays.

If you could recommend three things to have success as an Environmental Sustainability Manager, what would you recommend?

- 1) It's essential to keep educating yourself.** The world of sustainability is constantly evolving, and I believe continuous learning is crucial.
- 2) Be resilient and patient.** Change takes time, and progress rarely happens overnight. Be patient with yourself and others involved in the process. I'm naturally impatient, and I had to work hard on this over the years.
- 3) Build relationships and communicate effectively.** Collaborate with other teams and tailor your communication style to your audience. Communication is crucial to success, and people care more if they are involved.

What advice would you give to someone looking to become an Environmental Sustainability Manager?

Gain relevant education and skills. Having the PIEMA membership opened the doors for me. Besides, the IEMA is an excellent platform for educational resources and networking. Get hands-on experience through internships, graduate programmes or entry-level jobs. You also need to

be passionate. You can't work in sustainability if you are not enthusiastic and dedicated. I was lucky enough to have excellent mentors and trustful managers in my early career stage, which boosted my self-confidence and strengthened my enthusiasm for sustainability.

What is the most absurd statement that you have heard in your job?

"There is no climate change and global warming – look what summer we got (meaning wet and cold)!" I sometimes hear people denying global warming or playing down the effects of climate change. They understand global warming as sunnier and warmer summers, but they are missing the point of the whole climate change. I don't blame them. It is hard to explain and hard to understand. But I'm an optimist and believe we are getting better at raising awareness.

What are your long-term motivations in the company?

It will probably sound like a cliché, but my motivation is just to make this world a better place. The chance to make a tangible impact within a large organisation is incredibly motivating. The dairy industry is very challenging. We have committed to minimising our environmental impact and achieving net zero emissions by 2050, at the latest.

Like many other companies, we recognise that our biggest impact lies in Scope 3 emissions within our supply chain. Therefore, we work closely with farmers to implement sustainable practices that reduce their environmental footprint. I enjoy getting all parties together and targeting sustainable milk production.