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A path toward sustainability. The Barilla experience of stakeholder engagement

Barilla's competitiveness and leadership are the consequence of a long term vision, based on industrial rather than financial considerations. Thanks to this approach, Barilla has grown steadily through the years, building its solid reputation as a company with a strong competence in supply chain management: from the field to the table, from raw materials to the point of sale. Barilla has always linked its development to people's wellbeing and to the communities in which it operates. In order to further strengthen our development, Barilla has to grow increasingly in parallel with the civil society, bringing the company's and the general interest together.

The Barilla approach was always marked by a lot of initiatives and projects even if they occurred at basic and practical level and for the most part not communicated. In order to render the process more effective and consistent with the strategic plans, a new Sustainability Model was set up. The model is based on a multidimensional system of challenges, commitments and actions. We identified seven key areas.

In order to set up the Model we started an assessment phase of operations: 482 internal documents were gathered and examined and intense research was carried out; there were meetings with Barilla Directors, employees and technicians, visits to plants, laboratories, research centres. Then having, as a final goal, the objective of establishing a dialectical relationship that produces maximum value both for stakeholders and for the company itself, through continuous exchange of information experience and suggestions, Barilla has begun mapping its stakeholders: every company area analysed its activities and identified its stakeholders, grouping them into categories and giving them a relevance score. According to the results, a stakeholder map was outlined becoming a relation management tool for every company area. Barilla also decided to add a new element in stakeholder involvement practices involving them from the very first step of the reporting process setting up an experimental stakeholder forum followed by a second one having as participants important representatives from all the categories (consumers, retailers, media, NGO, trade unions, employees, scientific community, public institutions). The Sustainability Model was submitted to them in order to confirm, to change or to modify the internal challenges and the resulting commitments. Several ideas and contributions by the stakeholders were included in the Model that was published at the end of 2009 under the title "Challenges, commitments, actions for a sustainable growth". The document is the very basis for the first Sustainability Report that will be published in a couple of months. From now on Barilla will be working in order to set up a permanent forum of stakeholders from all the relevant categories.