

# Empty Promises or Meaningful Action?

## Assessing the food and beverage industry's racial justice actions in the wake of George Floyd's murder

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### Project aim

George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was murdered on May 25, 2020, by a White police officer. His murder sparked an unprecedented national response. By the end of that summer, Black Lives Matter protests had drawn record numbers of people into the streets who called for actions by civil society, governments, and corporations. Many companies responded with pledges to implement internal diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and/or to work towards racially just communities and society. However, two years later, the extent to which companies have actually acted to advance racial justice is uncertain.

Food and beverage companies are among the businesses that made racial justice pledges. They are well-positioned to contribute to policy, system, and environment changes to further racial justice – within their companies, in the local communities in which they operate, in the food sector, and in the broader social and political sphere. However, their actions must be viewed in the context of the long and well-documented histories of racialized marketing of junk food and sugary drinks to Black communities, and other industry activities that harm health and contribute to health disparities. This report describes racial justice actions taken by 25 leading U.S. food and beverage companies.

#### Methods

We collected publicly available information for 25 leading U.S. food and beverage companies about their racial justice statements, commitments, and actions during the summer of 2020 following George Floyd's murder and again in the fall of 2021. We searched company websites, reports (e.g., corporate social responsibility reports, annual reports), media releases, and social media posts. We assessed the status of each action we found – completed, in progress, or unknown. We attempted to verify actions and their status with each company.

#### Key findings

- Most companies made a public statement in response to the murder of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter protests. Of those making statements, most made progress implementing some racial justice actions. These companies completed 27% to 88% of announced actions.
- The number of racial justice actions completed or in progress varied substantially across companies, suggesting that companies with fewer actions could do more to catch up with their peers.
- All companies could take more actions - no company had actions in all categories. No company completed all its actions.
- Solely relying on counts of actions has limitations because the types of racial justice actions were diverse with respect to resources invested and their likely impacts on racial justice.

- Actions likely to have a larger impact on racial justice, such as supporting racial justice public policies or increasing diversity of employees and suppliers, tended to be less frequent. Among the companies that did act in these high impact categories, the proportion of activities that were completed was lower relative to other categories.
- The most common actions, such as charitable donations or organizing employee conversations and trainings about race, were easier to implement and had less potential for impact.
- While most companies made monetary donations to support community or societal racial justice efforts and organizations, the donations comprised a very small proportion of company annual revenue (< 0.001% to 0.57%).
- Publicly available information about the progress status of racial justice activities was difficult to find.

### Recommendations

Many companies made commitments to advance racial justice and equity and have begun taking action. While this is a good start, companies must do more. They must:

- Expand the scope of their actions and sustain them. Companies should prioritize high impact actions such as supporting public policies that address structural factors that sustain racism.
- Refrain from activities that increase racial injustice – these actions undermine their efforts to advance racial equity. Racialized marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages is a good example. Supporting racist policies and political candidates is another.
- Align their business practices with advancing racial equity.
- Devote more of their annual revenues to supporting community-based racial justice efforts.
- Be transparent and publicly accountable for the full spectrum of their actions - positive and negative - that affect racial justice and report on their actions using meaningful, standardized accountability metrics.

This report contains additional recommendations. Food and beverage companies should use their power and resources to do much more to advance racial justice. Our recommendations, based on the findings of this research, should be considered in light of the [full spectrum](#) of racial equity strategies companies should pursue.

## INTRODUCTION

George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was murdered on May 25, 2020 by Derek Chauvin, a White Minneapolis police officer. Video footage captured the murder, fueling a racial justice movement across the U.S. and the globe. By the end of that summer, Black Lives Matter protests had drawn record numbers of people into the streets who called for actions by civil society, governments, and corporations. Many companies spoke up, acknowledging the toll of structural racism and pledging to work towards a more racially just society. However, two years later, the extent to which companies have acted to advance racial justice is uncertain. While some companies acted, others failed to follow through or provide transparent information on what they have, or have not, accomplished.<sup>1–3</sup>

Food and beverage companies are among the businesses that made racial justice pledges. They are well-positioned to contribute to policy, system, and environment changes to further racial justice – within their companies, in the local communities in which they operate, in the food sector, and in the broader social and political sphere.

Food and beverage companies have a special obligation and unique opportunity to reduce racial inequities in nutrition and health and advance food justice. The food and beverages they produce and sell and how they market and distribute them are important determinants of diet quality. Thus, the actions they take to advance racial justice must be viewed in the context of their products and business practices.<sup>4</sup> The extent to which companies' product portfolios are healthful varies widely.<sup>5</sup> Some food companies may engage in discriminatory and racialized marketing that promotes unhealthy products in Black communities.<sup>6</sup> The working conditions in their fields, processing facilities, manufacturing sites, stores, and restaurants affect their employees' health, as we saw all too well within the meatpacking industry during the COVID pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

[Healthy Food America](#) assessed the actions of the top 25 U.S. food and beverage companies to advance racial justice in response to the murder of George Floyd and the ensuing Black Lives Matter movement.<sup>a</sup> This report describes what we found.

## METHODOLOGY

This section summarizes the methods we used to prepare this report. Appendix A describes them in more detail.

### Data




We identified 25 leading U.S. food and beverage companies based on revenue and sales data.<sup>8–11</sup> We collected publicly available information for these companies about their racial justice statements, commitments, and actions during the summer following George Floyd's murder on May 25, 2020 and again in the fall of 2021. We searched company websites, reports (e.g., corporate social responsibility reports, annual reports), media releases, and social media posts. We excluded actions that took place outside the U.S., were not specific to the Black community, or were made prior to the murder. We also excluded donations made solely by company-affiliated foundations unless the foundation was established after the murder specifically to address racial equity.

We created a set of action categories based on typologies used by organizations doing similar corporate racial justice tracking.<sup>12–18</sup> We further assigned categories to three spheres of influence: society-level,

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<sup>a</sup> This report does not provide a comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) assessment of each company. It was beyond the scope of this project to include other corporate practices that affect racial equity as described in the key findings section below.

community-level, and company-level.<sup>19</sup> Figure 1 lists the categories we created, grouped by sphere (we also included an “other” category, not listed). Category definitions are included in Appendix A.

| Society<br>   | Community<br>   | Company<br>  |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support law and policy</li> <li>• Support collective actions</li> <li>• Recognize Juneteenth</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make donations</li> <li>• Support communities</li> <li>• Host community conversations</li> <li>• Provide community resources</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase diverse suppliers</li> <li>• Increase diverse employees</li> <li>• Host employee conversations</li> <li>• Provide employee trainings</li> <li>• Enhance workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts</li> </ul> |

**Figure 1.** Spheres of racial justice action categories

## Analysis

### Actions

Our analysis reports on two measures of progress in implementing actions: actions completed and actions with some progress (defined as completed actions *plus* actions initiated but not yet completed). We included the second measure because some actions were more complex and ambitious and likely needed more time to complete. For these types of actions, initiation as well as completion indicated that a company was doing something to fulfill the commitments it made.

### Categories

We also report on the progress status of each action *category* by company. Some companies had multiple actions in the same category. In this case, we assigned the category status based on the action(s) with the highest status within that category (e.g., if there were two actions in one category, one complete and one with some progress, the category was coded as complete).

We defined high impact categories as those most likely to produce structural and systemic changes with the potential to impact many people. These categories are supporting law and policy change, increasing the diversity of suppliers, and increasing the diversity of employees.

### Company verification

We shared the coded data with each company for verification. Sixteen companies provided additional data or corrections. We included company-provided data if it met our inclusion criteria and was publicly available online. In total, we identified 258 actions, 31 (12%) of which were provided by the companies. Appendix B describes the results of the company verification process.

### Key terms

**Action:** A discrete activity implemented by a company to advance racial justice.

**High impact action:** Actions leading to structural and systemic changes with the potential to impact many people.

**Action progress status:** A code describing an action as complete, in progress, or progress unknown.

**Actions completed:** Company completed stated action.

**Actions with some progress:** Company either completed action or action was initiated but not yet completed.

**Action category:** A grouping of similar actions that share goals and activities.

**Action category progress status:** A summary code describing the status of actions within an action category, based on the action with the highest progress status within that category.

**Sphere of action:** A domain that groups actions operating at a similar level of social organization – societal, community, and company.

## RESULTS

Most companies – 21 out of the 25 included in this study - made a public statement in response to the murder of George Floyd expressing concern and/or the intention to take action to promote racial justice. Our analysis focuses on these 21 companies. The remaining four companies (JBS, Keurig Dr. Pepper, Seaboard, and U.S. Foods) did not make a statement regarding the murder and thus are not included in the analysis. While not making a statement, both Keurig Dr. Pepper and U.S. Foods implemented 11 actions to address racial justice. These actions included a commitment to increasing employee diversity, providing employee trainings and workshops, establishing employee resource groups, and creating a DEI leadership team. However, absent a statement, we could not determine if these actions were made in response to the murder.

### Company Actions

Each of the 21 companies initiated and completed multiple actions. Table 1 describes the number of actions taken and the progress status of those actions. Appendix C provides narrative descriptions of the actions taken by each company.

The number of racial justice actions varied substantially across companies, ranging from 2 to 13 completed actions per company and 4 to 18 actions with some progress. Coca-Cola, Mondelez International, and Kraft Heinz had both the most actions completed and the most actions with some progress (Figure 2). Costco, Hormel, ADM, and Nestle were among those with the least number of actions completed. Costco, Hormel, ADM, and Danone had the least number of actions with some progress. We were not able to determine the progress status of 27 actions (10.5%) among 13 companies.

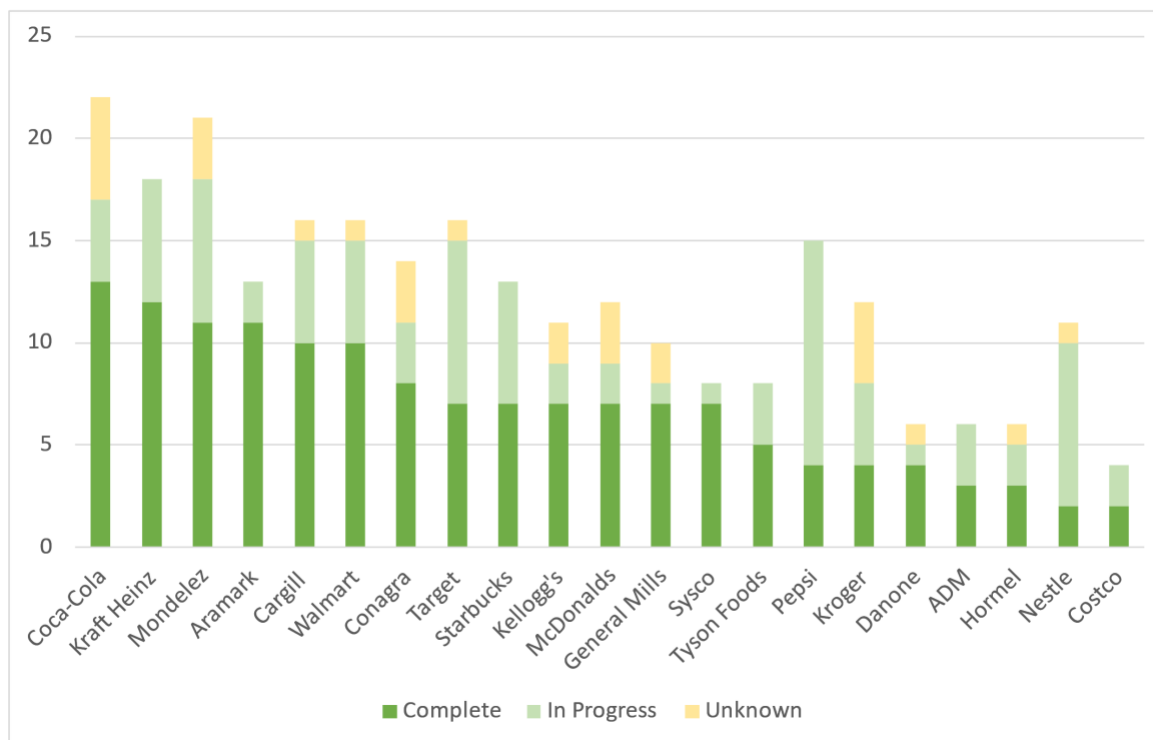
**Table 1. Company racial justice actions: number and status<sup>a</sup>**

|               | Society                           |                            |                      | Community      |                     |                              |                             | Company                                 |   |                             |                            |                       |                        |                |                          |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
|               | Action Category                   |                            |                      |                |                     |                              |                             |   |   |                             |                            |                       | Action Progress Status |                |                          |
|               | Support Law & Policy <sup>b</sup> | Support Collective Actions | Recognize Juneteenth | Make Donations | Support Communities | Host Community Conversations | Provide Community Resources | Increase Diverse Suppliers <sup>b</sup> | Increase Diverse Employees <sup>b</sup> | Host Employee Conversations | Provide Employee Trainings | Enhance Workplace DEI | Other                  | N (%) Complete | N (%) With some progress |
| ADM           |                                   |                            | 1                    | 2              |                     | 1                            |                             |   |   | 1                           | 1                          |                       |                        | 3 (50%)        | 6 (100%)                 |
| Aramark       |                                   |                            |                      | 1              | 1                   |                              |                             | 1                                       |   | 5                           | 2                          | 2                     | 1                      | 11 (85%)       | 13 (100%)                |
| Cargill       | 3                                 | 3                          |                      | 2              | 1                   |                              | 1                           |   | 2                                       | 1                           | 2                          | 1                     |                        | 10 (63%)       | 15 (94%)                 |
| Coca-Cola     | 2                                 | 1                          | 1                    | 2              | 1                   | 1                            | 1                           | 3                                       | 2                                       | 1                           | 2                          | 3                     | 2                      | 13 (59%)       | 17 (77%)                 |
| Conagra       |                                   |                            | 1                    | 1              | 3                   |                              |                             |   | 2                                       | 1                           | 1                          | 3                     | 2                      | 8 (57%)        | 11 (79%)                 |
| Costco        |                                   |                            |                      | 1              |                     |                              |                             |   |   |                             | 1                          |                       | 2                      | 2 (50%)        | 4 (100%)                 |
| Danone        | 1                                 |                            |                      |                | 1                   |                              |                             |   | 1                                       | 1                           | 1                          | 1                     |                        | 4 (67%)        | 5 (83%)                  |
| General Mills | 1                                 | 1                          | 1                    | 2              | 1                   |                              | 1                           | 1                                       | 1                                       | 1                           |                            |                       |                        | 7 (70%)        | 8 (80%)                  |
| Hormel        |                                   |                            |                      | 1              | 1                   |                              |                             | 1                                       | 1                                       | 1                           | 1                          |                       |                        | 3 (50%)        | 5 (83%)                  |
| Kellogg’s     |                                   | 1                          |                      | 2              | 1                   |                              | 1                           | 2                                       | 1                                       | 1                           | 1                          |                       | 1                      | 7 (64%)        | 9 (82%)                  |
| Kraft Heinz   |                                   | 2                          | 1                    | 2              | 1                   |                              |                             | 1                                       | 4                                       | 2                           | 2                          | 3                     |                        | 12 (67%)       | 18 (100%)                |
| Kroger        |                                   |                            |                      | 1              |                     | 1                            | 1                           | 2                                       | 2                                       | 1                           | 2                          | 1                     | 1                      | 4 (33%)        | 8 (67%)                  |
| McDonalds     |                                   |                            |                      | 3              | 1                   |                              |                             | 3                                       | 1                                       |                             |                            | 2                     | 2                      | 7 (58%)        | 9 (75%)                  |
| Mondelez      | 2                                 | 1                          | 1                    | 3              |                     |                              | 2                           | 2                                       | 3                                       | 1                           | 1                          | 5                     |                        | 11 (52%)       | 18 (86%)                 |
| Nestle        |                                   |                            | 1                    | 2              |                     |                              |                             | 1                                       | 2                                       | 1                           | 1                          | 3                     |                        | 2 (18%)        | 10 (91%)                 |
| Pepsi         |                                   |                            |                      | 3              | 2                   |                              | 1                           | 3                                       | 2                                       | 2                           | 1                          |                       | 1                      | 4 (27%)        | 15 (100%)                |
| Starbucks     | 1                                 | 1                          | 1                    | 1              |                     |                              |                             |   | 1                                       | 1                           | 2                          | 2                     | 3                      | 7 (54%)        | 13 (100%)                |
| Sysco         | 1                                 | 1                          | 1                    |                | 1                   |                              |                             |   |   | 1                           | 1                          | 2                     |                        | 7 (88%)        | 8 (100%)                 |
| Target        | 2                                 | 1                          | 1                    | 3              | 1                   | 1                            |                             | 3                                       | 1                                       |                             | 1                          | 1                     | 1                      | 7 (44%)        | 15 (94%)                 |
| Tyson Foods   |                                   |                            | 1                    | 1              |                     |                              |                             | 1                                       | 1                                       | 1                           | 1                          | 1                     | 1                      | 5 (63%)        | 8 (100%)                 |
| Walmart       | 1                                 | 1                          |                      | 2              | 1                   | 1                            |                             | 2                                       | 2                                       | 1                           | 1                          | 2                     | 2                      | 10 (63%)       | 15 (94%)                 |

**Notes:**

Progress status: Complete In progress Progress unknown No action reported

- a. How to read this table: Each cell in the table indicates the number of actions taken by a company in each action category. The progress status of a cell is indicated by a color, based on the progress status of the action with the highest status. The total number of completed actions across all categories for each company is summarized along with the number of actions completed or with some progress.
- b. Bolded categories identify high impact categories.

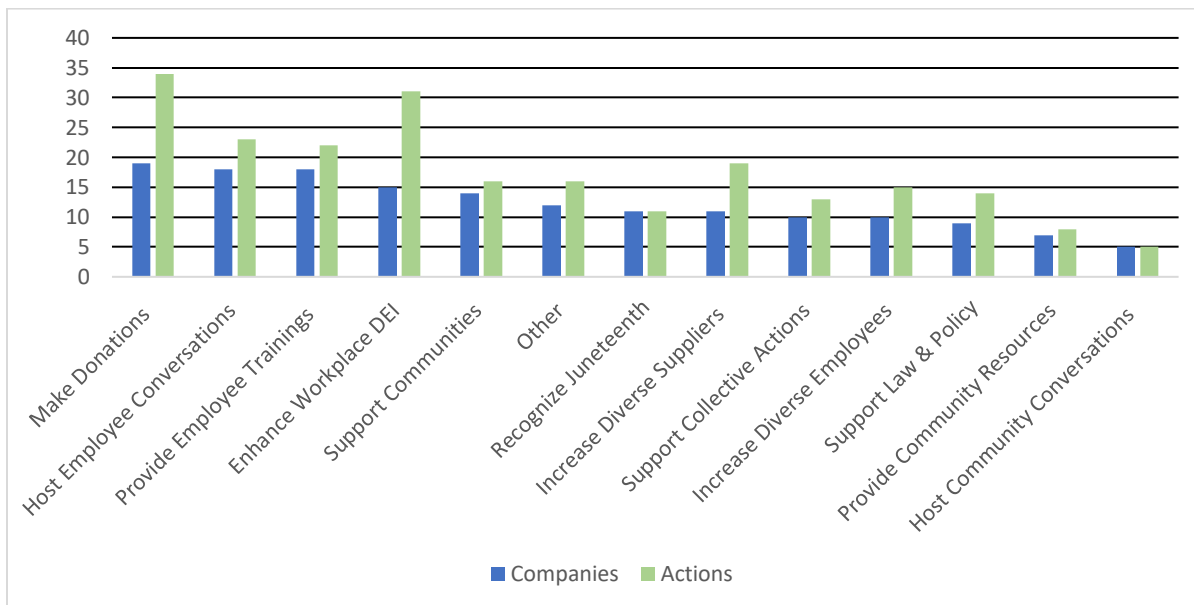


**Figure 2.** Number and progress status of actions by company

### Racial Justice Categories

Each company generally addressed multiple categories, ranging from three categories (Costco) to 12 (Coca-Cola) (Table 1). Within each category a company addressed, it usually took one or two actions.

There was considerable variability across categories with respect to the number of companies addressing a category and the number of actions completed or with some progress in the category (Figure 3).





**Figure 3.** Number of companies and actions with some progress towards racial justice categories

Donations, employee conversations, and providing employee trainings were the most common categories based on the number of companies with actions completed or with some progress. Donations, enhancing workplace DEI, and employee conversations were the categories with the most actions taken (completed or with some progress across all companies). The categories with the fewest companies pursuing them were hosting community conversations and providing community resources and education. These were also the categories with the smallest number of actions. Twelve companies had actions in the “other” category. The actions in this category included promoting Black History Month, reformulating products, and supporting electoral voting by employees.

#### High Impact Categories

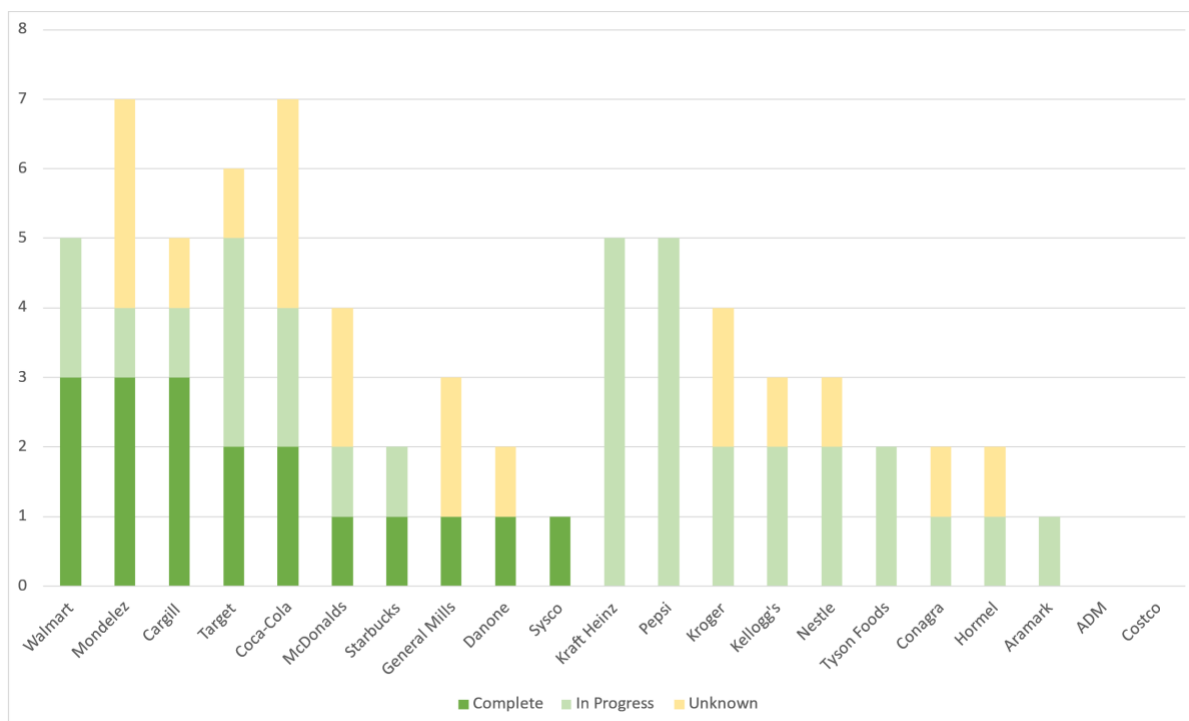
Action categories vary in their impact. Figure 4 provides examples of low and high impact actions taken. We defined three categories as having the highest impact. Less than half of companies made progress in influencing anti-racist policy and laws (43%) and increasing the diversity of their employees (48%). Just over half (52%) made progress in increasing the diversity of their suppliers. In contrast, more companies acted in lower-impact categories (Figure 3).

| High Impact Actions<br>   | Low Impact Actions<br>  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Committed to increasing the overall spending with small and diverse suppliers from 15% (2020) to 25% by 2025 (Aramark, Increase Diverse Suppliers)</li> <li>Committed to match employee demographics with national demographics by 2030 (Coca-Cola, Increase Diverse Employees)</li> <li>CEO signed release that urges lawmakers to adopt policing reforms that address police misconduct and increase accountability and transparency (General Mills, Support Law and Policy)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Posted article discussing importance of, and how to promote, diversity and inclusion in the workplace (Mondelez, Provide Community Resources)</li> <li>Hosted employee listening forums and education sessions on race, inclusivity and allyship (Nestle, Host Employee Conversations)</li> <li>Recognized Juneteenth with a day of learning, listening, and celebrating (Conagra, Recognize Juneteenth)</li> </ul> |

**Figure 4.** Example high impact and low impact actions taken by companies.

Figure 5 describes company actions and their progress status aggregated across the three high impact categories. In nearly every company, actions in these categories were less likely to have been completed relative to the proportion of completed actions overall (compare Figure 2 and Figure 5).





**Figure 5.** Progress status of actions by company for high impact categories only (influencing anti-racist policy and laws, increasing the diversity of suppliers, increasing the diversity of employees).

#### Donations

Most companies (90%) made monetary donations to support community or societal racial justice efforts and organizations. Donations totaled \$787.4 million across the 21 companies and ranged from \$125,000 to \$403.6 million. Three companies contributed 78% of donations. Donations comprised a very small proportion of company annual revenue (< 0.001% to 0.57%). Only \$4.7 million (0.6%) of the total donations were confirmed as completed. However, it is important to note that we cannot directly compare donations across companies, as some were one-time donations while others were described as multi-year. Table 2 provides details on the amounts, progress, and beneficiaries of monetary donations.

**Table 2. Company racial justice donations: amount, progress status, percent of company revenue, and recipients**

| Company       | Donation: % of company revenue | Donation: Amount <sup>a</sup> | Company revenue (billions) <sup>b</sup> | Donation Recipients                   |   |                                   |                                     |
|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|               |                                |                               |   | Scholarships & education <sup>c</sup> | Racial justice organizations <sup>d</sup> | Racial equity center <sup>e</sup> | Black-owned businesses <sup>f</sup> |
| Pepsi         | 0.574%                         | \$403.6 million               | \$70.4                                  | X                                     | X   |                                   | X                                   |
| Starbucks     | 0.425%                         | \$100 million                 | \$23.5                                  |                                       |   | X                                 |                                     |
| Target        | 0.123%                         | \$115 million <sup>g</sup>    | \$93.6                                  | X                                     | X   |                                   | X                                   |
| Mondelez      | 0.021%                         | >\$5.5 million <sup>h</sup>   | \$26.6                                  | X                                     | X   |                                   |                                     |
| Walmart       | 0.020%                         | \$103 million                 | \$524                                   |                                       | X   | X                                 |                                     |
| Costco        | 0.015%                         | \$25 million                  | \$163.2                                 |                                       |   |                                   | X                                   |
| Kellogg's     | 0.015%                         | \$2 million <sup>g</sup>      | \$13.8                                  |                                       | X   |                                   |                                     |
| Cargill       | 0.014%                         | \$16 million                  | \$114.6                                 | X                                     |   |                                   |                                     |
| Tyson Foods   | 0.012%                         | \$5 million                   | \$43.2                                  |                                       | X   |                                   |                                     |
| McDonalds     | 0.009%                         | \$1.75 million                | \$19.2                                  | X                                     | X   |                                   |                                     |
| General Mills | 0.004%                         | > \$750,000 <sup>i</sup>      | \$17.6                                  | X                                     |   |                                   |                                     |
| Kraft Heinz   | 0.004%                         | >\$1 million <sup>i</sup>     | \$26.2                                  |                                       | X   |                                   | X                                   |
| Kroger        | 0.004%                         | \$5 million                   | \$132.5                                 |                                       |   | X                                 |                                     |
| Coca-Cola     | 0.003%                         | \$1 million <sup>g</sup>      | \$33                                    |                                       | X   |                                   |                                     |
| Hormel        | 0.003%                         | \$250,000 <sup>j</sup>        | \$9.6                                   | X                                     |   |                                   |                                     |
| Nestle        | 0.002%                         | \$2.25 million                | \$91.2                                  |                                       | X   |                                   |                                     |
| Conagra       | <0.001%                        | \$125,000 <sup>j</sup>        | \$11.1                                  | X                                     |   |                                   |                                     |
| ADM           | <0.001%                        | >\$200,000 <sup>i</sup>       | \$64.4                                  |                                       | X   |                                   |                                     |
| Aramark       | --                             | undisclosed                   | \$12.8                                  |                                       | X   |                                   |                                     |
| Danone        | --                             | None                          | \$26.9                                  |                                       |   |                                   |                                     |
| Sysco         | --                             | None                          | \$52.9                                  |                                       |   |                                   |                                     |

**Notes:**

Progress Status: Complete In progress No donation made

- Use caution in comparing donations across companies, as some were one-time donations while others were multi-year.
- Revenue for the year 2020 was collected from company websites, annual reports, or through a Google search.
- Donations to support the advancement of education for Black students or to provide scholarships for equity in education (e.g., Thurgood Marshall College Fund).
- Donations to organizations with missions to advance racial justice or racial equity (e.g., National Urban League, Black Lives Matter, NAACP, One Ten Coalition).
- Donations to create a company center or foundation focused on advancing community or societal racial equity.
- Donations to support Black owned businesses, restaurants, and community organizations.
- Donation is from both the company and the company foundation.
- Total donation ranges from \$5.5 million- \$8.5 million (signature partnership donation was undisclosed but defined as \$2 million - \$4,999,999).
- Includes a donation with undisclosed amount.
- In addition to monetary donation, also provided food donations to impacted communities.

## KEY FINDINGS

The murder of George Floyd and the ensuing Black Lives Matter movement prompted many food and beverage companies to make commitments to advance racial justice. We set out to determine the extent to which these commitments were followed with concrete actions. We analyzed data describing racial justice actions taken by 25 leading U.S. food and beverage companies during the 18 months following George Floyd's murder.

**Most companies are making at least some progress in implementing actions to advance racial justice.**

Of the 25 companies we evaluated, most (21) made a public statement in response to the murder of George Floyd and took racial justice actions. However, the number of actions varied substantially across companies as did the proportion of actions completed. Companies completed 27% to 88% of their announced actions and made some progress on 77% to 100% of these actions. Nineteen companies donated money to support racial justice efforts, however the donation amounts were very small proportions of annual revenues (< 0.001% to 0.57%).

**High impact actions are less frequent.** Fewer than half of companies took action to promote anti-racist public policies or to increase workforce diversity. Among the companies that did act in high impact categories, the proportion of activities that were completed was lower relative to other categories. Supporting anti-racist laws and policies may be one of the highest impact actions a company can take, with effects reaching beyond the food sector and influencing society at large. Such actions were uncommon in response to the murder of George Floyd. The most common actions, such as charitable donations or organizing employee conversations and trainings about race, were easier to implement and had less potential for impact.

**Solely relying on counts of actions has limitations as a measure of corporate performance. This metric does not account for the time and resources needed to implement an action nor its potential impact.**

Some actions (e.g., signing a racial justice collective action pledge, such as the [One Ten Coalition](#)) may require less effort compared to others that may prove more impactful (e.g., increasing a company's Black employee representation). Variability in effort and impact is present even within the same action category. For example, both Pepsi and McDonald's pledged to increase their purchasing from diverse suppliers. Pepsi plans to more than double its spending by 2025 while McDonald's has pledged to increase its spending by 10% by 2024. We encourage the reader to consider the impact and time needed to fully implement each action in addition to the total number of actions taken by each company.

The most frequently addressed categories may be the ones that are easiest to implement. For example, giving money is simple, and this category has both the greatest number of actions and companies implementing it. Hosting employee conversations and providing employee trainings were also popular categories and are relatively simple to execute. In contrast, the less frequent categories – supporting law and policy change, hosting community conversations and providing community resources and education – were externally focused, suggesting companies may tend to focus their efforts internally on actions that impact their employees and business. Companies may also have more ability to implement internal actions and may not have relationships with community partners to complete actions in the community and society spheres. They may avoid advocating for policies that could be perceived as controversial.

**Publicly available information on corporate racial justice actions can be difficult to find, and some companies do not fully and transparently disclose the status of their actions.** It was often difficult to find public-facing information regarding the progress status of racial justice actions. We were unable to determine the status of at least one action category for nine (36%) of the companies. Other organizations examining corporate racial justice actions have noted similar experiences, particularly for identifying donation recipients.<sup>1,3,20</sup>

Consistent and transparent provision of information about company actions is essential for authentic accountability to the public and shareholders for making progress in advancing racial justice. Companies have much work to do to in this regard.

## DISCUSSION

**All companies have more work to do.** Companies must do more to promote racial justice. Saying they will take action is not the same as taking action. The wide variation in numbers of actions initiated or completed suggests that companies with fewer actions could do more to catch up with their peers. All companies could take more actions - no company had actions in all categories. No company completed all of its actions. The types of actions we found do not address the full spectrum of anti-racist strategies.<sup>19</sup> Companies should prioritize high impact actions such as supporting public policies that address structural factors that sustain racism.

**It is challenging to rank or compare companies.** We chose the number of actions completed by a company as the best, and least subjective, metric to assess company performance. Both [As You Sow](#) and [JUST Capital](#) have created tools that rank companies based on their racial justice efforts.<sup>13,21</sup> While we did not explicitly rank companies, we presented data comparing companies by number of actions completed. Coca-Cola had the most actions completed in our analysis, was in the top 10% of the *As You Sow* list, but only in the top 50% of the *JUST Capital* list. Pepsi was ranked in the top 5% by both *JUST Capital* and *As You Sow*, while our data showed that Pepsi completed relatively few actions. These dissimilarities are likely due to differences in methodology. *As You Sow* developed a rubric to score companies across a broad set of 26 performance indicators including environmental justice.<sup>21</sup> *JUST Capital* examined a set of equity policies and practices that was more focused than those we included (anti-discrimination policies, community investments, education and training programs, pay equity, racial/ethnic diversity data, and response to mass incarceration).<sup>22</sup>

An article in Greenbiz, while not using a formal ranking method, reported on top and bottom performers based on company-described racial equity goals.<sup>3</sup> It found that Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Nestle set the most ambitious racial equity goals. We concluded that both Coca-Cola and Pepsi were among the companies reporting the most actions with some progress. In contrast, in our analysis Nestle described an average number of actions with some progress and relatively few actions completed. Interestingly, the Greenbiz article found Kraft Heinz goals to be limited, while it was among the top companies in our analysis. These differences are likely due to differences in timeline (Greenbiz assessed company goals one year after the murder of George Floyd; Kraft released its data later and we included activities over a longer time period) and outcome measures (we focused on progress status of actions while they examined commitments and goals).

While not directly comparable, our work and these other efforts provide complementary and somewhat different perspectives on how companies compare in their racial justice efforts. Our analysis was the only one, to our knowledge, to assess the progress status of actions.

**Some corporate practices increase racial injustice, undermining any actions they take to advance racial equity.** Our report focuses on the actions companies are taking to promote racial justice. These actions must be placed in the context of other company practices. Some company activities *increase* racial inequities.<sup>19</sup> Marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages is a good example. Companies may employ racialized marketing tactics that promote unhealthy products to BIPOC communities, including fast food, candy, sugary drinks, and snacks.<sup>6,23-26</sup> For example, McDonald's has a history of targeting Black and Latine children in its advertisements.<sup>24,27</sup> Food companies like Kraft General Foods have created racially-targeted marketing campaigns using methods adopted from the tobacco industry.<sup>28</sup>

Companies may include misleading and deceptive health and nutrition claims in their marketing activities.<sup>29–31</sup>

Some food and beverage companies support policies, candidates and programs that block progress in racial justice and health equity or fail to promote pro-equity policies. For example, in March 2021, [Coca-Cola remained silent](#) as Georgia Republicans pushed for a law to restrict voting rights and only spoke out once the law was passed.<sup>32,33</sup> Sugary drink taxes benefit BIPOC and low income people because revenues are selectively invested in these communities, yet beverage corporations oppose this public health policy.<sup>34</sup> The food and beverage industry preferentially supports Republicans (68% of corporate contributions from this sector) who typically are less supportive of racial justice policies.<sup>35</sup> According to Color of Change, Coca Cola, Chick-fil-A, Kroger and other companies donate to police foundations, which pass funds to police departments that may support militarization of police departments, surveillance systems, and violence against Black people.<sup>36</sup>

**Our findings are similar to others.** Others have also reported on corporate actions to promote racial justice.<sup>3,37</sup> They documented actions similar to those we have described, including increasing employee representation (specifically, Black leadership), increasing diversity of suppliers, investing in employee education and training programs, and establishing anti-harassment and other DEI policies and practices. They also found additional actions, such as linking DEI outcomes with executive pay, disclosing workforce and board racial composition, and increasing board diversity. Differences in reported actions reflect variation in companies included and time frames examined.

These reports also found that companies could and should do more. For example, As You Sow found 57% of companies made statements following Floyd’s murder, and 30% of companies made donations.<sup>21</sup> The highest ranked company received a score of 72%, indicating all have more work to do. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility asked companies about the extent to which they consider racial justice as they develop and sell their products.<sup>37</sup> Few if any directly addressed how their current business practices and policy activities contribute to racial inequities and health disparities. Companies instead focused on philanthropic and internal DEI initiatives. The 2021 CEO Blueprint for Racial Equity, while looking at many business sectors, notes that companies shy away from actions in the societal sphere, in line with our findings.<sup>19</sup> JUST Capital concluded that while companies often share their DEI policies, they are less likely to report metrics documenting policy implementation.<sup>13</sup> The Creative Investment Research Black Lives Matter (BLM) Donation Tracker found only \$652 million of the \$67 billion donations pledged has been donated.<sup>20</sup>

## LIMITATIONS

Our analysis had several limitations related to availability of information and the scope of our project.

**Some companies may be doing more, or less, than what we found.** The status of some actions changed. For example, [Pepsi released](#) new information about its diversity and equity initiatives after our data collection ended.<sup>38</sup> [Coca-Cola rescinded its pledge](#) to require that at least 30% of new contracts for legal work go to Black attorneys after our data collection phase; this action is included in our analysis.<sup>39</sup>

By design, we only included publicly available data. Some companies provided non-disclosed information during the company data verification process. For example, Coca-Cola shared that it was changing its DEI trainings from required to optional, essentially not meeting its original action commitment. However, because this information was not publicly available, it is not included in our analysis. Additionally, some companies do not provide public progress updates or information may be incomplete.

We may have missed some public information about company actions because of difficulties finding it on company websites or limitations of our search strategy. A company's website contains large amounts of information, and some is embedded within reports or web pages not retrieved by the search terms we used. We attempted to address this limitation by asking companies to verify our data. We found that we captured 88% of actions with our original search strategy. However, only 16 of the companies responded to our data verification requests.

**Our project includes only actions taken in response to George Floyd's murder and the ensuing Black Lives Matters movement; it is not a comprehensive assessment of corporate racial justice actions.**

Some companies were already implementing racial justice actions prior to George Floyd's murder that, by design, we did not include. These actions could be the same as those taken by companies in response to George Floyd's murder. For example, Sysco increased its business with minority-owned suppliers and increased employee diversity prior to the murder; these actions are not included in our analysis.

It was beyond the scope of this project to assess the full set of company actions addressing racial equity. A wide range of corporate practices and products may affect racial justice, as noted by others.<sup>24</sup> For example, targeted, racialized marketing may exacerbate health inequities.

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Food and beverage companies are among the many businesses that expressed outrage and made racial justice commitments in response to the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and the resultant national outrage and protests. We analyzed the racial justice actions taken by 25 leading U.S. food and beverage companies to address systemic racism within society, the community, and their companies. While taking actions and fulfilling commitments is a good start, companies must do more. They must expand the scope and impact of their actions, sustain them, increase the share of revenues dedicated to racial justice, and transparently share progress (or lack thereof). They must acknowledge the contradiction between their stated support for racial equity and the practices that undermine it, such as racialized marketing of unhealthy products and silence or even support of racist policies and politicians. They must promote and provide healthful foods and beverages, support effective nutrition policies such as front-of-package warning labels that identify less healthy products and speak out against racist policies and acts. Otherwise, racial justice pledges are at risk of becoming a tool for public relations and burnishing corporate images rather than being authentic commitments leading to meaningful actions. Based on our findings, we recommend the following to improve the quality, integrity, and impact of corporate racial equity commitments:






**Companies must be transparent about, and accountable for, the full spectrum of their actions - positive and negative - that affect racial justice.** Many companies are making progress to address racial justice. However, it is difficult to find exactly what they are doing. Information is often hidden within large reports or is insufficiently detailed. Transparency about company actions that negatively impact racial equity is also needed, including campaign contributions, lobbying activities, and racialized marketing.



**Corporate performance in advancing racial equity must be measured by meaningful and standardized accountability metrics** such as those being developed by [The Corporate Racial Equity Alliance](#). Currently, it is difficult to objectively assess how well companies are addressing racial justice and compare actions across companies. Standardized metrics are needed to increase transparency around corporate actions and encourage companies to make real, impactful change.

We further recommend that food and beverage companies act to advance racial justice within their company, in the communities where they operate, and in society at large by:

|   |   |
|---|---|
|    | <p>Implementing internal anti-racist policies, processes, and systems that advance racial equity and justice.</p> <p>Conducting racial equity audits and sharing findings publicly.</p>   |
|    | <p>Increasing support for Black communities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based racial justice efforts.</li> <li>• Monetary and non-monetary investments in Black businesses and communities.</li> <li>• Assistance to Black-owned food businesses and farmers and prioritizing them as suppliers.</li> </ul>  |
|    | <p>Providing impactful donations to anti-racist organizations that promote racial justice and address structural racism.</p> <p>Reporting transparently on all political and charitable donations.</p>  |
|    | <p>Lobbying and advocating in support of public policies that advance racial justice, especially those that address the structural factors that sustain racism.</p> <p>Taking a stand against policies that promote or perpetuate racism.</p>   |
|   | <p>Adopting healthy and just marketing practices. Marketing should truthfully, transparently, and accurately describe product ingredients, nutrients, and health impacts and emphasize the healthiest products.</p> <p>Eliminating racialized marketing practices that target BIPOC communities, especially children.</p> <p>Supporting policies that restrict marketing to children and protect their online privacy.</p> <p>Supporting policies that require warning labels for products high in added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat.</p> |
|  | <p>Reformulating products with negative health impacts (e.g., those high in added sugars, salt, and saturated fat) with healthier ingredients.</p>  |

We recognize that these recommendations, generated from our examination of food company practices and review of others' work who have reported on corporate actions to promote racial justice,<sup>3,37</sup> represent only a subset of the spectrum of racial equity strategies corporations can and should adopt. The [CEO Blueprint for Racial Equity](#) offers a more comprehensive set of strategies that all food companies should consider.<sup>19</sup> Food and beverage companies must increase their commitments and actions to move their companies and society further along the arc of racial justice.



## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Methodology

Appendix B: Company verification results

Appendix C: Company actions to address racial injustice (detailed)

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|               |             |         |
|---------------|-------------|---------|
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| Cargill       | Kraft Heinz | Target  |
| Coca-Cola     | McDonald's  | Tyson   |
| Costco        | Mondelez    | Walmart |
| General Mills | Nestle      |         |
| Hormel        | Pepsi       |         |

Recommendation icons were made by Freepik from [www.flaticon.com](http://www.flaticon.com)

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