

## What Does a Sustainable Can of Beans Look Like?



Two years ago [Truitt Brothers](#) decided to figure that out, and added two products, green beans and pears, sourced and prepared sustainably, to their more traditionally packaged goods which they had been producing for over 30 years. While the sustainability-focused line is still less than 5% of their whole business it has quadrupled in growth in those two years, and that growth is projected to continue. In fact, they have already doubled their offerings by adding kidney and garbanzo beans.

Speaking on a panel at [Slow Food Nation](#) on Friday, Peter Truitt declared the canned green beans' time arrived. He acknowledged most people, himself included, would choose fresh produce over processed when available. However, in most of the US you cannot purchase local and fresh produce consistently year around. At those times Truitt believes canned produce can be a very sustainable second choice.

What does a sustainable can of beans look like? First, its fresh product is sourced during the growing season from any one of a small group of family farms within 20 miles of the production facility. Second, those farms and the processing plant are all [Food Alliance certified](#). Truitt Brothers also recently did a life cycle analysis (available on their website) to compare the impact of canned versus frozen green beans on climate change. In Food Alliance style (which focuses on continual improvement), Truitt admitted that the steel in cans had the largest impact but that also just meant there was lots of room for them to improve upon it.

I am very excited about the possibility of bringing “local” and affordable to people year around, particularly in those northern environs where the winter does not offer varied food choices. As a friend pointed out though, could this not be the “re-start” of the industrial food system if only a few canning companies worked with their local growers and then shipped the product all over the country? Perhaps, but if so then we need more regional food producers following the Truitt Brothers' model. At which point we will start to understand the economies of scale and just how many customers (individual or institutional) are needed to support a regional network of farmers and processors. Wisconsin should considering adding this idea to [its local food initiative](#).

As a side note: For those of you not avidly following the “local food” conversation component of sustainable agriculture, you might ask, “What are the benefits of local food?” It keeps local money circulating in the local economy. It helps maintain an economic value on land which might otherwise be more likely built upon, (causing the loss of a range of natural resource benefits to the local ecosystem). It also limits food transportation's impact on the environment. However, it is important to note that the positive or negative benefits of local food on climate change is far from clear yet. Read [this post](#) on Triple Pundit from May 2007 and [this one](#) from the New York Times in August 2007 for examples of these uncertainties.

Source: <http://www.triplepundit.com/pages/what-does-a-sustainable-can-of-003470.php>