

What women want

For these 24 women, 2025 is a year of action. As powerful leaders, they recognize that you don't always need to roar to be heard. Instead, they lead by nurturing connections, uplifting their communities and fostering environments that cultivate a more sustainable future. They understand that true external change begins with internal transformation.

In this feature, we spotlight two dozen women from across the CPG ecosystem, each using business as a force for good. From CPG founders to investors, communication strategists, nonprofit activists and others, the women spotlighted herein represent environmental advocates, sustainability pioneers and pillars of inspiration who are leaving their mark on the natural products industry.

Among their many guiding principles, one idea shines through: interconnectedness. Collectively, their insights point to a more collaborative and regenerative tomorrow.

For this, *Natural Foods Merchandiser's* first-ever Women's Issue, we asked each of these women to peer into the future and answer one question:

With regard to sustainability, what's one thing you think people need to lean into in 2025, or one area where they could have the greatest impact in 2025?

Read on to learn what they had to say.

Two dozen changemakers weigh in on what's next for food, CPG and sustainability.

Illustration by Egle Plytnikaite





Kate Geagan, M.S., RDN
Co-founder and director of strategy, Food + Planet

Taking a broad view (of sustainability)

Think beyond carbon! Nature, just like the human body, doesn't like a single factor trying to drive a dynamic living system. Just as monoculture never was the answer, a mono focus on carbon risks undermining ecological systems as well. I recently returned from South America with Guayakí, where I was touring the company's Indigenous producer communities that are regeneratively harvesting yerba mate from living forests. Driving in between these areas, we passed what our ecologist called "dead forests"—miles and miles of "carbon planting" forests of tightly packed evergreens that advanced economies are emphasizing as a carbon solution. However, they hold no biodiversity, no birds, no understory and no local community opportunities. In my view, the single greatest way that we can have impact is by rewarding brands and retailers that are taking a broader view of sustainability metrics beyond carbon.



Kristie Hall
Founder and president, True Grace Health

Sara Newmark
Chief operating officer, True Grace Health

Regenerating wellness

When it comes to sustainability in 2025, one area where people could have the greatest impact is by leaning into regenerative agriculture. This approach goes beyond simply reducing harm to the environment—it actively improves soil health, enhances biodiversity and sequesters carbon. By supporting practices like crop rotation, reduced tillage, cover cropping and agroforestry, we can rebuild ecosystems while producing nutritious food.

Consumers have the power to vote with their dollars by choosing brands that bolster impactful movements like regenerative agriculture. By supporting companies committed to doing the right thing, shoppers can drive meaningful change and help create a healthier future for the planet.

Cynthia Barstow
Founder, Protect Our Breasts

Advocating for change

In 2025, brands and retailers should focus on understanding their full impact on people and the planet—how their operations and products contribute to climate change and are affected by it, what chemicals of concern are present in their products and packaging, and how they can work toward safer, more sustainable alternatives.



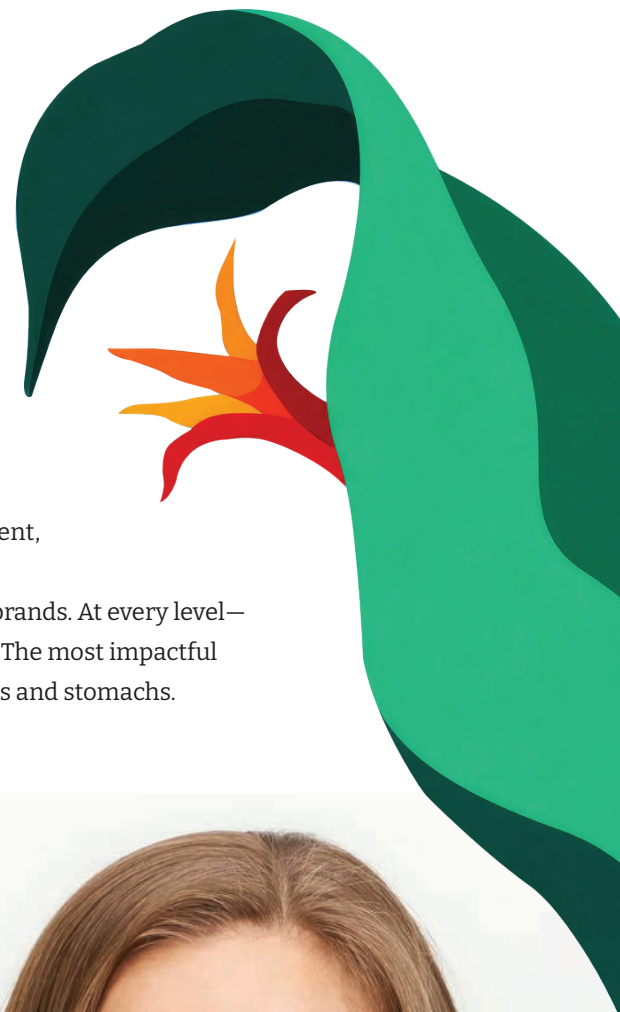


Alisa Knapp
Owner, Grows Together Consulting

Supporting from seed to shelf

We are all part of an interconnected food web, and 2025 demands bold action. Brands are the nexus point between farmers and eaters. Consumer packaged goods companies have immense power to support the transition of farmland to organic and regenerative practices by creating demand for regenerative ingredients, designing products using regenerative ingredients and building resilient, long-term, collaborative supply webs.

Retailers can amplify this work by supporting and promoting these brands. At every level—farmer, processor, entrepreneur, retailer or investor—we are all eaters. The most impactful choice we can make is to support values-aligned brands with our dollars and stomachs.



Darcy Shiber-Knowles

Vice president of operational sustainability and innovation, Dr. Bronner's

Connecting us all

Lean into our interconnectedness! At Dr. Bronner's, we encourage our community to not just think about one thing, but instead to think about the ways seemingly separate concerns connect and intersect, and about how we are stronger and more able to tackle intractable challenges when we move together. For instance, we are so excited and proud to see our paper-based soap refill cartons succeeding at retail and our truly circular bulk soap refill systems expanding beyond Southern California. We could not do this innovative work without close collaboration with consumers, retailers, designers, distributors and storytellers. True circularity depends on businesses embracing collaboration. For the Earth and all its inhabitants, please lean into interconnectedness—it can shift your approach, and we can go further together!



Courtney Pineau

Executive director, The Climate Collaborative

Championing climate action

This is the year to expand your climate action beyond your company walls. Whether you are seeking to solve a challenge, explore new pathways in your work, build a peer support network or amplify your impact by contributing new solutions to the commons, collaboration and partnership are essential. We are stronger and more effective when we create a relational web of support and insight for climate action practitioners. Let's go further, faster together in 2025!

Sara Balawajder

Director of investments, Builders Vision

Funding regenerative from the ground up

In 2025, I am hopeful that we will continue to see interest build in regenerative agriculture—both from investors and farmers. I’m particularly excited about the development of regenerative ag insurance products, which are critical for providing the financial support and risk management necessary to protect farmers making the transition. Buy-in from the insurance industry will be key to ensuring the long-term success of these practices and advancing a more sustainable agricultural future. This is an area we’re keeping a close eye on at Builders Vision, and we’re excited to work with others in the sector to help move the needle in 2025 and beyond.



Abianne Falla

Founder, CatSpring Yaupon

Planting local roots

As we think about sustainability, we think first of the land and the importance of restoration and regeneration. The more retailers who stock sustainable, regenerative organic products, the more consumers will shift their purchases to these brands. In 2025, the greatest impact we can have on sustainability is through our purchasing preferences. With every dollar, we’re voting for the future of our planet. By shifting to locally sourced, regenerative and organically grown products, people can have the greatest impact on their community, the land and beyond.



Julia Collins

Founder and CEO, Planet FWD

Gushing for green

In 2025, I believe we need to embrace the power of “green gushing”—a practice of enthusiastically sharing data-driven stories that highlight the real, measurable impact of sustainability efforts. As consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability, they are looking for brands they can trust—ones that are transparent about their actions and outcomes. Telling these stories isn’t just about building consumer trust; it’s about inspiring collective action.

When brands share their progress—whether it’s reducing emissions, sourcing more sustainably, or improving supply chain practices—they set an example that others can follow. Green gushing turns sustainability from a box to check into a movement that people want to be part of. By leaning into data-backed storytelling, companies can not only build credibility and accountability, but also ignite excitement and optimism about what’s possible. In a time when the climate crisis can feel overwhelming, showing progress through real-world results is one of the greatest ways we can empower individuals and businesses alike to create meaningful change.

Stephanie Jerger

Vice president of operations, Organic Trade Association

Strengthening communities

What people should lean into is the idea of strengthening their communities. That could include their business relationships, education partners or coalition partners. The intrinsic value of these relationships should be so ingrained in a company or organization that to be separated from them would reduce the company’s market value. It should be too expensive to leave your community behind.





Tina Owens
Principal, Snowhaven Regeneration

Rethinking systems for change

The standards we use within the food system for both business and policy levers are ready for a refresh, but we're still using yesterday's tools to try and resolve tomorrow's problems. In many cases we have reached the end of what last century's systems (and mindsets!) could provide for us in scale, yield, nutrition, health and agricultural economics, and we've just been repeating the same cycles with increasingly suboptimal outcomes. It's time for us to turn big pages on interconnected systems, supported by a wealth of science, for what is possible with continuous living cover, protecting biodiversity [and] better understanding of ecosystems, human health impacts, nutrition levels, animal welfare and on-farm economics. We need a systems-level rethink and I, for one, am on the lookout for those with whom I can collaborate for broadscale change. Be a changemaker.



Elizabeth Candelario
Chief strategy officer,
Mad Agriculture

Trusting in nature

As we look to 2025, I believe the greatest impact will come from leaning into holistic, nature-based solutions on farms—systems that enhance biodiversity, restore ecosystems and build resilience to climate change. This means embracing practices like agroforestry, prairie strips and riparian restoration, which integrate nature into agriculture in a way that benefits both the land and the people who depend on it.

These approaches are a chance to move beyond sustainability and toward regeneration, recognizing that we must rebuild what's been degraded and create systems rooted in reciprocity with nature. If food companies, investors, activists, policy makers and consumers align on supporting these solutions—through sourcing strategies, funding, policy and purchasing decisions—we can transform not only farms, but food systems, economies and ecosystems for generations to come.



Rachel Dreskin
CEO, Plant Based Foods Association

Embracing plant-based

For 2025 I am most excited for people to enthusiastically lean into the opportunities that plant-based foods create, versus viewing increased production and consumption of plants as an unfortunate necessity. We have long known that improving our food system is one of the greatest areas of impact when it comes to sustainability, and research shows that producing plant-based foods contributes just nearly half the greenhouse gas emissions of animal-based foods. Nevertheless, our food systems continue to incentivize resource-intensive, degenerative food production.

The potential for innovation and diversity is vast when it comes to increased plant consumption. Hundreds of visionary plant-based food brands are constantly innovating and bringing new products to market that meet consumers' growing taste for delicious, convenient and healthful offerings. By consciously and powerfully leaning into plant-based foods, we can reimagine how to feed the world while meeting urgent sustainability goals.

Brita Lundberg
Communications manager, Lundberg Family Farms

Revolutionizing rice

Eat the change you want to see in the world! People eat three times a day, which means we each have three opportunities per day to support regenerative organic farmers who are fighting climate change, building soil health, supporting biodiversity and promoting social fairness.





Nora Schaper
Co-founder, HiBAR

Going plastic free

One area where people can have a major impact on sustainability is by embracing “less is more” thinking—specifically, reducing reliance on water and single-use packaging in everyday products. It’s time we rethink the lifecycle of the products we use daily, from how they’re made to what happens after they’re used. Concentrated, water-free and plastic-free products like solid bars are a powerful example of how small shifts in consumer behavior can create ripple effects for sustainability. This approach not only conserves resources but also drives innovation in packaging and product design across industries. As consumers, retailers and brands, we need to collectively lean into supporting solutions that prioritize function and environmental impact equally. By choosing products that eliminate waste at the source and innovating within these principles, we’re investing in a future where sustainability isn’t just an add-on—it’s the norm.





Lauren Tucker
Founder and CEO, reNourish Studios

Nourishing business cultures

Slowing down to go fast. What if we spend the time to challenge our current mindset and approach to see new potential? What if we develop new capabilities to care for the living world through the act of doing business? What if we create nourishing business cultures that can nourish our teams and the communities and ecosystems our businesses are a part of? What if we make plans for the next seven generations instead of this quarter?



Sarela Herrada
Co-CEO, SIMPLi

Regenerating at retail

We've seen the regenerative organic movement pick up incredible speed, with Regenerative Organic Certified seeing triple-digit growth in the past year. As an industry, we hold the power to keep accelerating momentum as consumer support grows stronger. If you're a retailer, I encourage you to stock multiple regenerative organic brands and SKUs on your shelves. This supports the full agricultural ecosystem and also signals what's trending and important to your shoppers. And for consumers, don't eat the same thing every day! When you expand your daily menu, you open yourself up to an entire ecosystem of rich, diverse, delicious rotational crops.



Heather K. Terry
Founder and CEO, GoodSAM

Transforming from within

One of the most impactful shifts we can make in 2025 is to simplify sustainability by starting with ourselves. When founders and business leaders ask me how to make their organizations more sustainable or impactful, my immediate response is always: What are you doing personally? Sustainability often feels overwhelming because we view it as a massive, external system to fix. But real change starts with individual actions. When you take responsibility for your own habits, tackle them one by one and align your actions with your values, it shifts your mindset. That shift ripples into your business decisions and inspires those around you.

At GoodSAM, my sustainability journey has been deeply tied to challenging myself and questioning the status quo. I've learned to ask: Are the "truths" we're told about the market really true? Or are they rooted in outdated paradigms? I've found that we can often reimagine what was once deemed "the only way." Innovation and impact happen when we dare to approach challenges differently with an eye toward aligning with what we truly believe in. By starting with ourselves, we unlock new ways of thinking and create a more authentic, sustainable foundation for our businesses and communities.



Briana Warner
President and CEO, Atlantic
Sea Farms*

Creating seas of change

We so often talk about sustainability in environmental terms only—but, to me, true sustainability is a food system where the well-being of people and planet are central. Food can be produced in a way that benefits all stakeholders, and each industry leader can work toward that goal every day. I hope to see more companies double down in their commitments to create a better planet.

*Warner stepped down from this role in January 2025 and remains a strategic advisor to the company.



Lara Dickinson
Co-founding executive
director, One Step Closer

Fostering community

Driving systems change demands a shift in mindset. While there's no single solution for every company leader, we can all lean into values-driven communities that inspire us to evolve our capability to create meaningful change. My passion remains strong for advancing women's leadership, waste-free packaging, climate solutions, catalytic capital and J.E.D.I principles. However, what excites me most is the work we've championed at OSC since day one: fostering a community of the brightest CEOs in natural products to elevate their businesses—and, in turn, their collective impact on our food and agricultural systems.

**Benina Burroughs
Montes**
Owner and managing partner,
Burroughs Family Farms



Putting farmers first

In 2025, you can lean into sustainability by supporting farmers and brands that prioritize regenerative practices, fair wages and ethical sourcing, while also advocating for policies that promote sustainable food systems. Purchase directly from local farmers or choose products with certifications such as Regenerative Certified or Regenified to ensure your money supports eco-friendly and equitable practices. Embrace brands with transparent sustainability efforts, pay fair prices to reflect the true cost of responsible production and amplify the stories of farmers and businesses driving positive change. By sharing knowledge, engaging in policy advocacy and adopting mindful consumption habits, you can help build a resilient food system that benefits the planet and its people.



Mikaila Ulmer
Founder and CEO, Me & the Bees Lemonade

Saving the bees

We're all about doing our part for the bees and for the planet! Our new cans are 100% recyclable, and we hope this strategic switch inspires everyone to make eco-conscious choices in 2025. By supporting businesses committed to sustainability, especially small ones that use recycled materials, we can all make a difference together.



Catherine Hunziker
Owner, WishGarden Herbal
Remedies

Planting herbal wisdom

We are committed to supporting American-grown medicinal herbs in 2025. Here's a shocking reality: Over 80% of medicinal plants used in U.S. supplements are imported from overseas. Yet one of our biggest climate challenges is unused, degraded soil right here at home—it's a massive contributor to climate change. By bringing medicinal herb cultivation to this dormant American land using regenerative farming practices, we can transform it from a climate problem into a climate solution. Every time you choose products made with domestically grown herbs, you're helping turn unused dirt into living soil, supporting local farmers and building a more resilient herbal medicine supply chain. It's not just about sustainability—it's about growing our medicine close to home while actively healing our planet in the process.

