

## **United States of America – Badger Tackling Climate Change**

### Author

Birdthistle, Naomi

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## **Chapter Title: United States of America – Badger tackling climate change**

**[Chapter Author 1: Naomi Birdthistle, Griffith University]**

**[Chapter Author 1: [n.birdthistle@griffith.edu.au](mailto:n.birdthistle@griffith.edu.au)]**

### **Author/s Biography/ies:**

#### **Associate Professor Naomi Birdthistle**

Naomi has entrepreneurship in her blood. She worked in her family business for over 20 years, which is the largest indoor funfair in Europe. On leaving the family business she ran her own consulting business for a period of time, where she consulted family businesses on management issues. Naomi's passion for family business management and entrepreneurship is evident by her research outputs. She wrote the first ever PhD on family businesses in Ireland which won the Family Firm Institute's 'Best Doctoral Dissertation Award'. She has published 32 peer-reviewed papers, six books; 24 book chapters, 63 conference papers and an abundance of national and European reports. Naomi's research covers many areas within the entrepreneurship and family business discipline including the following: entrepreneurship education, minority groups and entrepreneurship; women owned and led businesses; succession planning in family businesses; divorce and family business and the role women play in family businesses. Naomi supervises PhDs around women entrepreneurship, family business management issues and high growth firms.

### **Introduction**

The climate in the United States (US) is drastically changing. The average temperature is expected to rise by about 2.5 degrees Fahrenheit (Wuebbles, Fahey & Hibbard 2017), with the resulting impact on sea levels. This means that higher sea levels are expected on the East coast of the US and precipitation becoming heavier either as rainfall or snowfall and heat waves will be more frequent. The scale of climate change going forward depends primarily on the amount of greenhouse gases (especially carbon dioxide) emitted globally. One family business, based in New Hampshire on the East Coast of the United States is doing its best to contribute to lowering greenhouse gas emissions and that family business is W.S. Badger.

### **Background to W.S. Badger**

W.S. Badger is a family business since 1996 where they produce organic body care products such as sunscreens, bug repellents, lip balms, and moisturizers in New Hampshire, USA. The genesis of the business idea came from Bill Whyte who needed to soothe his fingers having been a carpenter for many years (Badger, 2022a). Following working in some extreme conditions in New Hampshire, where he often had chapped hands due to the cold, he created a balm for his hands by mixing beeswax and olive oil. He thought that other craftsmen like himself would be interested in purchasing the balm as well, so the product idea was born, literally from the kitchen of the Whyte family household. The original name Bill had for the company was unfortunately already taken but the name Badger came to him, and he settled on that. As is often with a family business, everyone pitched in, and you would often see members of the family sitting around the kitchen table filling the

tins of balm by hand. These tins were then packed into wooden boxes made by Bill who drove around New Hampshire in his work van selling the products. Badger now produces over 100 products, which are sold in 20 countries and employs over 90 people (Badger, 2022a).

The business is now being run by the second generation and is registered as a mission-driven B-Corp. Certified B Corporations are those businesses that have met the highest verified standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and legal accountability. B Corps are quite prominent around the world as there are over 5,000 businesses that have met the registration criteria to be classified as a B Corp (B Lab 2022a). These businesses hail from more than 80 countries and 156 industries, employing over 400,000 workers and harnessing the power of business to solve major social and environmental challenges facing the world today, including the climate crisis.

### **Family business philosophy and family business values**

The philosophy that drives the second generation of the family business is deeply rooted in its commitment to the environment and to its community:

*Our company philosophy flows from the ground up, beginning with our relationship to the grounds that support our building and the landscapes that supply our ingredients. We walk through these spaces gratefully, respectfully, and always with our footprints in mind.*

(Badger, 2022a)

Their mission supports the reason why they were identified as being among the top 10% of Certified B Corporations worldwide and recognized as ‘Best for the World Overall’ and ‘Best for the Environment’ in recognition of its positive impact on the environment, workforce, local communities, suppliers, customers, and corporate governance from 2014 to 2019. The co-CEOs identify the mission of Badger as:

*We’re on a journey to create a healthier world. We are inspired to make healing products and run a healthy business where money is the fuel and not the goal, where fun is encouraged, and where we cultivate good through our actions and advocacy.*

(Badger, 2022a)

The family behind Badger have identified four key themes that represent their values (Badger 2022a), and they are illustrated in Figure 1:



Figure 1: W.S. Badger values

The Whyte family, who are behind Badger are very proud of what they create, and they highlight how products are often conceived by employees and/or come from suggestions from their customers. In line with their philosophy and their mission, they adopt a 'natural' approach to their ingredients which they choose based on having as little processing associated with them and are organic. They choose suppliers that endeavour to have close relationships with Badger. Badger as a family business is a staunch advocate for regenerative and sustainable agriculture. The 'Walk a healthy trail' value of the family behind Badger is directly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #13 – Climate Action. This is evidenced by the fact that they state that '*climate justice...is an integral part of our daily practices*'. This family value is further embedded in the family business through having a clear goal of protecting their 'natural resources' and taking a responsibility for their '*actions and having a net positive impact on the world*', which is clearly aligned with SDG#13. The Badger family is an excellent example of a family business that displays familiness. Frank, Lueger, Nose & Suchy (2010) define familiness as the specific result of the structural coupling of family and enterprise, which can bring forth a particular identity as a family business that has grown historically and incorporates different content relations such as particular abilities to innovate. Badger has 'kindness' as their 'own compass'. They say:

*Community is at the heart of our company. We treat each other with kindness, embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion. We support and uplift each other through our advocacy, community service, and charitable giving.*

(Badger, 2022a)

### **The family behind the business.**

The leadership of the family business has transitioned to the second generation and interestingly the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) position is shared by the founder's two daughters Emily and Rebecca. Emily has been a part of Badger from its initial conception, even though still in high school, she helped when filling the tins that contained the balm, with other members of the family around the kitchen table. Currently, she is co-CEO with her sister Rebecca but also oversees Sales, Product Development and Quality. She has been able to step into these positions having learnt the operational side of the family business through having roles in customer service, sales management, production development, marketing, and quality. Rebecca, Emily's sister is responsible for marketing and sustainability initiatives within Badger. Rebecca's reputation has gone further afield. For example, she has addressed the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, in support of organic and regenerative agriculture. She has also appeared before Congress advocating for safer cosmetics and attended Senate and House briefings on Capitol Hill in support of family-friendly workplace practices and chemical reform. In 2019, Rebecca was appointed to the National Women's Business Council, which discusses potential solutions to the challenges women in business face, and subsequently recommends solutions to the administrator of the Small Business Association, Congress, and the President (The Secret Thoughts of CEOs 2021).

Badger has had a lot of growth since its humble beginnings back in the mid-90s. Today, it employs more than 90 people and has been recognised as a leader within the natural products industry. Badger has innovation at its core and the family constantly considers its stakeholders (employees, suppliers, community, customers and of course, the environment) when it develops new products.

## Some key milestones of W.S. Badger

As Figure 2 illustrates, Badger has seen some major growth and development in the 25 plus years it was established.

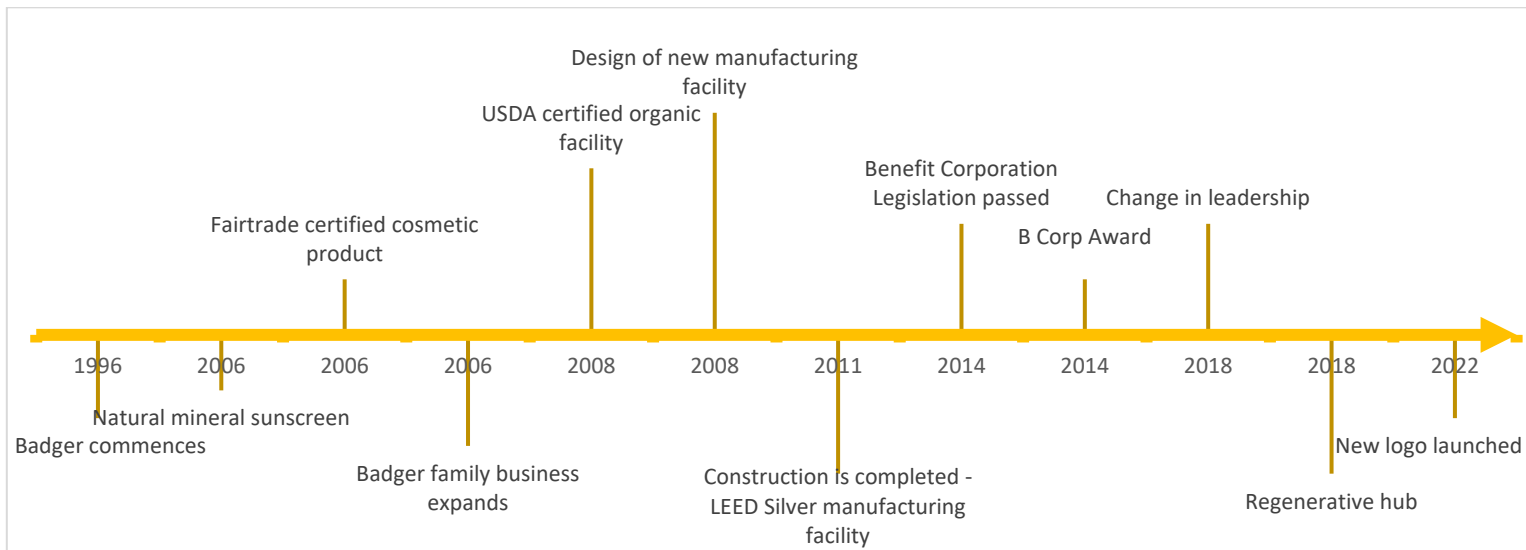


Figure 2: Key milestones in Badger's history

As previously stated, WS Badger was established in 1996 in New Hampshire, USA through the introduction of a balm that was produced from the home of the founder: Bill Whyte. Fast forward 10 years and the family business has expanded greatly. Most notably is the inclusion of a sunscreen product which was subsequently rated as the most effective and safest sunscreen and has received the 'Protect Land & Sea' certification. Products which have received this level of certification are products that have been tested in a laboratory setting that verifies the product is free of chemicals that are on the HEL List (Haereticus Environmental Laboratory 2018). 2006 was a busy year for Badger because it also introduced a fair trade certified cosmetic product and the management team was increased through the inclusion of Katie, Bill's wife and their two daughters: Emily and Rebecca. These new additions also saw the introduction of a formal set of principles that aimed to direct the company going forward. Lastly, in 2006, Badger introduced the 'Babies at Work' benefit which aims to enable Badger to be recognised as a family-friendly workplace.

Badger's philosophy is such that they create only products that people need, and they are keenly aware of the impact that manufacturing has on the environment. Therefore, they let nature often guide them and thus only use organic products. In 2008, Badger was designated a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified organic facility, which meant that Badger complies with the USDA organisation regulations. To achieve organic certification, Badger developed an organic system plan that detailed how its operations comply with the regulations, and this plan was reviewed by a certifying agent (McEvoy 2020). Following this, Badger implemented its organic system plan. Next an inspector visited Badger's operations and certified that Badger's operations met all the organic standards set. Badger's inspection report was then presented to a certifying agent who agreed with the inspectors that Badger complies with the organic standards since it was granted this right in 2008. To emphasise the focus the Whyte family have on the organic nature of their products, Bill Whyte says:

*"We tend to be organic fanatics. That's because we believe that sustainable organic agriculture is our hope for the future. Imagine food, clothing, and shelter produced in harmony with nature, without the use of toxic chemicals polluting earth, air and water today. It's easy for me to imagine, because it makes sense."*

(Conti, 2018, para. 24)

The family decided to consider the future growth and development of Badger and bought land and designed a new environmentally friendly manufacturing facility for the growing business that would stand the test of time and be sustainable. The land on which they built the manufacturing facility was an old sand mine in Gilsum, New Hampshire. To stay true to their core philosophy, they wanted to rejuvenate land that was negatively affected by mining.

The construction of the manufacturing facility concluded in 2011 and is one of the largest post and beam buildings on the east coast, which includes skylights, windows, and the use of plants to promote the health and wellbeing of its employees. The grounds surrounding the Badger manufacturing facility are home to beehives, edible fruits, wildflowers, and organic gardens. Due to its construction, Badger received the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver status. LEED is a building certification program that encourages a more sustainable approach to the way buildings are designed, constructed, and operated which aims to deliver the triple bottom line returns of 'people, planet and profit' (US Green Building Council, 2022). Another significant event in 2011 was the registration of Badger as a B Corp by B Lab. To be designated a B Corp there are three criteria a business must meet (B Lab 2022b, para.2):

1. Demonstrate high social and environmental performance by achieving a B Impact Assessment score of 80 or above and passing B Lab's risk review. Multinational corporations must also meet baseline requirement standards.
2. Make a legal commitment by changing their corporate governance structure to be accountable to all stakeholders, not just shareholders, and achieve benefit corporation status if available in their jurisdiction.
3. Exhibit transparency by allowing information about their performance measured against B Lab's standards to be publicly available on their B Corp profile on B Lab's website.

In 2014 Badger was instrumental in changing the legislative system in the State of New Hampshire. What was enacted was the benefit corporation legislation which saw the creation of a new legal framework specifically designed for mission-driven businesses to incorporate their commitment to bettering their communities and the environment as a part of their business model (Fitzgerald, 2015). Badger subsequently was the first company in New Hampshire to elect benefit corporation status. As Senator Kelly says:

*"The new benefit corporation law allows our NH businesses to compete, attract talent, market what they do best to investors and customers, and create jobs. I am so proud that W.S. Badger will be the first to take advantage of this new law, which allows them to have a broader impact benefiting our environment and our community."*

(Fitzgerald, 2015, para 5).

2018 saw some major milestones being achieved, least of all a change in the top leadership of W.S. Badger. Bill's two daughters: Emily and Rebecca became the family business's Co-CEOs, which they

defined as Collaborative Executive Officers. Maintaining their father’s drive for environmental activism, both Emily and Rebecca designate climate activism and regenerative agriculture as core facets of the family business's ongoing purpose. According to Newton et al., (2020), regenerative agriculture is another way of producing food that may have lower environmental and/or social impacts. The focus of regenerative agriculture is on soil health, water management, fertilizer use and more. The Rodale Institute highlight that regenerative agriculture is ‘a method of farming that improves the resources it uses, rather than destroying or depleting them’ (The Climate Reality Project, 2019, para.6). In 2018 Badger was appointed as an FDA-registered drug facility and all the manufacture of Badger’s sunscreen is now done in-house. In 2022, Badger redesigned its logo and packaging to show the simplicity of its products and how the family business focuses on people and the planet. Badger has received many awards such as B Corp’s Best for the World in environmental activism; the Alnoba CEO Environmental Responsibility Award 2021, and the ‘Real Leaders Impact Award’ in 2021.

### **Aligning the family business with SDG#13 – Climate Action**

Climate action is at the forefront of W.S. Badger’s commitment to its environment. As they say themselves: ‘we stand for safe, effective healing products made with pure, organic ingredients. We stand for healthy and family-friendly business’ (Badger 2017). To address climate action and to show their commitment to it, the Whyte family signed an open letter in 2017 to the international community pledging their part in upholding the Paris Agreement and efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28% by 2025 (ibid.). In the same year, the family established the ‘Climate Collaborative’ which involved identifying five commitments to reverse climate change (see Figure 3).

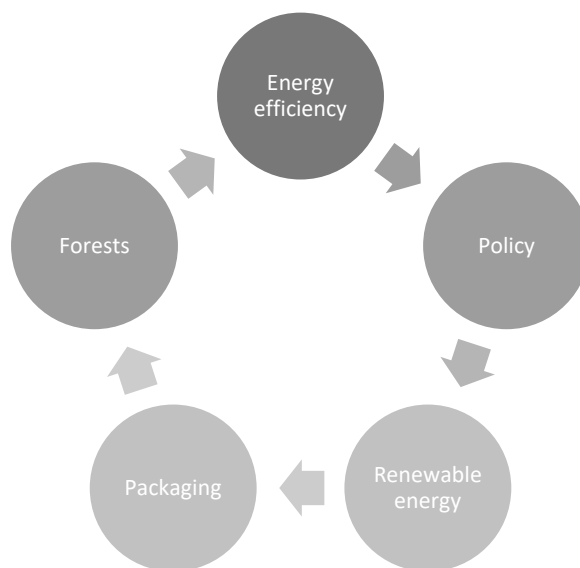


Figure 3: The commitments Badger has made to climate action

Badger as a manufacturing business must have access to energy sources to ensure its manufacturing facility is operational. Badger monitors its energy use and implements practices where possible to reduce its energy consumption and GHG emissions. The Whyte family are clear in its support of renewable energy and energy efficiency and supports climate action. Following on from the energy efficiency issue, Badger has switched to 100% renewable power and has purchased ‘Renewable Energy Credits’ (Badger, 2017). To continue with ensuring climate action is at the core of Badger’s

philosophy, Badger has made a commitment to support more sustainable alternatives to plastic and has reduced the number of materials used in its packaging and ensures more efficiency in its use. The fifth commitment focuses on forestation and supports the Sustainable Development Goal where there is a call for halting deforestation. Badger has taken the steps to ensure that the commodities within its supply chain i.e., palm, soy, paper/pulp, come from deforestation-free sources (Badger 2017). In 2018 they added a sixth commitment to ‘integrate carbon farming in our agricultural supply chain and increase our regenerative capacity’ (Badger 2019, para 4).

In 2019 Rebecca attended the UN Climate Change conference and addressed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in ‘support of organic agriculture and a moratorium on genetic engineering to preserve healthy ecosystems and biodiversity’ (Badger 2021, para. 26).

### **Powered by the sun**

Badger has partnered with a renewable energy company called ReVision Energy, which has resulted in the company headquarters being powered solely by the sun. As Rebecca says:

*“With this important commitment to solar, we’re building on our momentum to reduce our carbon footprint and do our part to solve the greatest challenge facing humankind today— climate change. Signing this contract is just a first step in taking responsibility for our onsite energy use and setting a goal of NZ 2030 (Scope 1 - 3) underscores our promise to take actionable steps right now that benefit our customers, employees, society, and the planet.”*

(Fitzgerald, 2019)

ReVision Energy has installed 1,445 panels at Badgers headquarters, which will generate 600,000 kWh of clean electricity annually. The energy saved is equivalent to taking 61 cars off the road or planting 338 acres of forest (Fitzgerald, 2019). Other initiatives employed by Badger to ensure that the business is good for the environment include the reduction in water usage through the manufacturing of waterless products, which are super concentrated products that can then be housed and shipped using less energy due to their compact nature (Badger, 2022b). When water is required, Badger uses a solvent that is natural and not harmful to the environment, which means that the water used in the production of their products can flow back into the earth without harming the environment. Waste that is collected at Badger when cleaning their equipment is brought to an industrial-level composting facility which then turns that waste into rich soil. Other waste generated, for example, by their employees having their lunches at Badger, is composted on the grounds and fed to local pigs during the winter (Badger, 2022b).

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