Climate Action and Business Leadership in Georgia: Drawdown Georgia Business Compact Launch Event

Summary

As the one-year anniversary of Drawdown Georgia approached, the Ray C. Anderson Center for Sustainable Business at Georgia Tech's Scheller College of Business launched the Drawdown Georgia Business Compact, the first regional business compact in the U.S. focused on climate action. In this launch event, Dean Maryam Alavi moderates a panel with representatives from Goodr, Norfolk Southern, Better Earth, and Google, exploring how Georgia businesses of every size are committing to carbon reduction, collaboration, and equity as founding members of the Compact.

Key Takeaways

● The Compact launched with 16 founding member companies, including Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Atlanta Gas Light, Autodesk, Better Earth, Cox Enterprises, Delta Air Lines, Eversheds Sutherland, Goodr, Google, Interface, Norfolk Southern, Southwire, TK Elevator, The Coca-Cola Company, UPS, and YKK Corporation of America, aiming to leverage Georgia's business community to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

● Panelists shared concrete steps their companies are already taking: Goodr diverts food waste to a nationwide nonprofit network and offers "trash talking" education services, Norfolk Southern is targeting a 42% reduction in scope one and two emissions intensity over 15 years, Better Earth is building domestic compostable packaging manufacturing in the Southeast, and Google aims to run on 24/7 carbon-free energy by 2030.

● The panel emphasized that equity has to be central to climate action, not separate from it, with Better Earth located in Clarkston, Georgia's most diverse square mile, and Goodr highlighted as a Black woman-owned, majority-women company built from the ground up around equity and access.

● Panelists pointed to a wave of emerging legislation, from California's SB 1383 requiring businesses to donate edible food, to state and local packaging and extended producer responsibility bills, to potential SEC rules requiring public companies to report on sustainability efforts, as both a challenge and an opportunity for the Compact's members.

● On the question of greenwashing, panelists agreed that transparency and honest reporting are essential, cautioning that unregulated terms like "biodegradable" can mislead consumers, while legally defined terms like "compostable" carry real accountability.

Transcript Notice: This transcript was generated automatically and may contain transcription errors. It has been lightly edited for clarity. Please refer to the video for the most accurate record.

Dr. Beril Toktay: Good morning, good morning, everyone. We're excited to welcome everyone to the panel discussion on climate action and business leadership in Georgia, moderated by Dean Maryam Alavi. This is the first of a four-event sequence for the launch of the Drawdown Georgia Business Compact, which is the first regional business compact in the U.S. focused on climate action, something we're very proud of.

My name is Beril Toktay, and I'm the faculty director of the Ray C. Anderson Center for Sustainable Business. I'm joined by my colleague Michael Oxman, managing director of the center, to welcome you and give a bit of background before handing over to Dean Alavi. Our center is nested in the Scheller College of Business at Georgia Tech, and our mission is to empower the leaders of tomorrow to create sustainable businesses and communities, or, to put it more pointedly, to educate and inspire the Ray C. Andersons of tomorrow. We do this through our nationally recognized sustainability curriculum, our award-winning co-curricular student activities, cutting-edge research from our affiliated faculty, and, last but not least, by closely partnering with the business community. The Drawdown Georgia Business Compact we're launching today is going to work across all of these channels, and we're very excited about that broad engagement.

One thing that's unique about the Compact is that it builds on the comprehensive, multi-university, multi-partner Drawdown Georgia research effort. That work, which lasted about a year and a half, identified 20 high-impact carbon mitigation solutions for the state, and you can learn more by visiting either the Drawdown Georgia research portal or the Drawdown Georgia website, both of which are linked from the Compact website in the chat. That research effort continues, with a focus now on solution activation and building a statewide carbon emissions dashboard, in parallel with the launch of the Compact. Michael, handing it over to you now. And you may be muted.

Michael Oxman: I was muted, my apologies. The Compact will leverage the collective impact of Georgia's business community to achieve a net zero carbon future through a just, competitive, and sustainable transition. We're thrilled to have 16 Compact founding members so far: Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Atlanta Gas Light, Autodesk, Better Earth, Cox Enterprises, Delta Air Lines, Eversheds Sutherland, Goodr, Google, Interface, Norfolk Southern, Southwire, TK Elevator, The Coca-Cola Company, UPS, and YKK Corporation of America.

As you can see, they're large and small, across different industries, with business activities across the state, positioning the Compact to not only impact carbon reduction, but also promote jobs and ensure an equitable transition to a low-carbon economy. We're thrilled to have four of these companies joining us today on this panel. Starting in January 2022, we'll be launching the real work of the Compact, and we look forward specifically to working with Compact members by initiating collaborative projects, exchanging best practices, supporting innovation platforms, and reporting on our collective progress. We hope many of you participating today will consider having your organizations join the Compact as founding members, we'd love to hear from you.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to the Ray C. Anderson Foundation for its generous partnership and support, and we believe Ray C. Anderson would be proud to see the business leadership represented in this Compact. With that, we'll turn it over to the Dean of the Scheller College of Business and Steven P. Zelnak Chair, Maryam Alavi. Dean Alavi has been a strong advocate for elevating sustainability in business, whether through our college's strategic planning process, in the classroom, or in research. Dean Alavi, the floor is yours.

Maryam Alavi: Well, thank you, Beril and Michael. I could not be more excited to be here and to help with the official start of the Drawdown Georgia Business Compact, and to moderate our panel today. I'll introduce the panel members shortly, but before doing so, I'd like to share some initial thoughts. The Compact couldn't come at a better time, given the recent completion of Georgia Tech's new strategic plan and the Scheller College of Business's upcoming strategic plan release. As Michael mentioned, sustainability themes are prominent throughout the Georgia Tech strategic plan, and they remain core tenets for Scheller College, as evidenced by our top-five ranking over the last three years by Corporate Knights MBA.

We're seeing many companies invest sustainability and carbon mitigation directly into their core business strategy. The Drawdown Georgia Business Compact helps leverage this momentum, and positions the state not only as a great place to do business, but as a leader in local action on this pressing global issue. We now have 16 companies in the Compact and are excited to welcome even more.

Now, to our panel discussion. I'll introduce our panelists and then ask a number of questions, and after that, we'll open it to the audience, and our panelists will answer as many questions as time permits. Audience, please put your questions in the chat or the Q&A function. The bios of our panelists are on their LinkedIn profiles, so in the interest of time, I won't go over their many accomplishments, and will only introduce them by name and organizational affiliation. In alphabetical order, we have Jasmine Crowe, founder and CEO of Goodr, Nick Pearson, global head of energy policy at Google, Josh Raglin, chief sustainability officer for Norfolk Southern, and Savannah Seydel, vice president of sustainability for Better Earth.

Let me start by asking each of you to briefly tell us about your organization and how you found your way to your current role. Jasmine, let me start with you.

Jasmine Crowe: Definitely, and again, thank you so much to the Ray C. Anderson Foundation and Drawdown Georgia for having me. Jasmine Crowe, founder and CEO of Goodr, and we really sit at the intersection of food waste and hunger. We believe hunger isn't an issue of scarcity, but rather a matter of logistics, and it's our belief that if we're wasting 72 billion pounds of perfectly good food every year, while people go food insecure at the same time, we really need to connect excess food to the people who need it. In addition to working on the edible spectrum, in 2019, when Goodr became a certified B Corp, we also began handling all food waste for our clients. If it's inedible, we work with them in three different ways, to compost it, send it to animal farms, and, if there's enough tonnage, actually convert it into biodiesel fuel or energy. We have three partners right now, Divert and StormFisher being two of the largest, who host anaerobic digesters across the country. So think of Goodr as a waste management company, specifically for food.

Maryam Alavi: Very good, and just briefly, how did you find your way to your current role, what got you going on this to begin with?

Jasmine Crowe: I've been invested in the hunger fight, if you will, for over a decade. I started feeding people experiencing homelessness and hunger out of my apartment in 2013, taking meals down to the streets of downtown Atlanta and into low-income senior high-rises. A video of my work went viral, and someone said, "This is so amazing, who donates the food?" And the truth was, nobody did. So I went to Google, how can I get food donated, what happens to extra food, and learned about food waste, and became really upset about how much food was going to waste. That was really the impetus that led me to where we are today.

Maryam Alavi: Great, well, thank you, that's a great story. Josh, the same question.

Josh Raglin: Great to be with you today. I'm currently chief sustainability officer at Norfolk Southern, I've been with Norfolk Southern for 25 years now. We're primarily a freight rail company, we operate across the eastern 22 states of the United States, with over 4,000 customers from around the world. My educational background is in wildlife and forestry, and I led our nature-based solutions platform for over two decades before assuming the chief sustainability role about a year and a half ago. Thank you for having me, it's an exciting day.

Maryam Alavi: That's great, thank you, and welcome. Savannah, tell us about Better Earth.

Savannah Seydel: It would be my pleasure, and echoing the thanks, thank you so much to the Ray C. Anderson Foundation, to Scheller College and Georgia Tech, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to be here, and for this Business Compact to exist. It's so exciting. Better Earth is a national compostable food service packaging provider, we're on a mission to make sustainability in the food service industry accessible. What brought me to this role is really just being a conscious consumer, packaging is really personal for all of us, we all buy things, order things, get things. I think we've often treated packaging as an unfortunate necessity, but it doesn't have to be that way, and what's beautiful about this space is the opportunity to have an impact at scale. If you take one small bakery in Atlanta, they could serve 700,000 slices of cake to go per year. If you convert them to plant-based compostable packaging that actually gets composted, that's 700,000 units of single-use plastic diverted away from our landfills, rivers, and streams, and the microplastics that can poison us. It's incredibly empowering, motivating work, and a very dynamic field. Excited to be in it, and excited to be here with all of you.

Maryam Alavi: Well, great, thank you. And Nick, your corporation doesn't need much introduction, we all know what Google does, but tell us a bit about how you found your way to your current role.

Nick Pearson: Thank you, Maryam, I appreciate it, and many thanks to the Foundation and to Georgia Tech. As a proud son of Georgia, I'm really excited about the progress being made here, and about Drawdown Georgia and its potential. As you mentioned, at Google we're very proud of our record on climate, on addressing the energy consumption we're responsible for as a very large company. We're proud to have been carbon neutral since 2007, but that's not good enough, we aim to be 24/7 carbon-free by 2030. We take that seriously, and we believe it can happen, not just for our company, but, even more importantly, by creating tools and a platform for individuals and other companies to green themselves up and pay better attention to their own carbon output and footprint.

As for background, I'm born and raised in Atlanta, I'm a Grady baby, so I've been on the Georgia Tech campus many times. I started my career in the energy and environment sector working on Capitol Hill many years ago, then worked for a utility for a number of years. I'm proud to say Dr. Marilyn Brown at Georgia Tech and I were former colleagues, back when she served on the board of the Tennessee Valley Authority. I've been at Google for about six years now, and have headed up our energy program for the better part of 2021, and we're really excited about the progress we're already seeing. But we know we have a momentous task ahead of us to make sure we're creating positive impacts globally when it comes to energy consumption and climate change. Thank you again for the time, I look forward to this discussion.

Maryam Alavi: Well, thank you all for being here, welcome. Let me move to my second question, and I'd like to address it to Savannah first. Can you talk about your organization's commitment to carbon reduction, and how you anticipate your membership in the Compact can advance that commitment?

Savannah Seydel: It'd be my pleasure. It goes without saying, to this group and to everyone attending, that we're facing an existential crisis in global climate change, and the food service industry's impact is substantial and undeniable. Food service packaging makes up roughly a third of all U.S. municipal solid waste, and the world's food system is responsible for a quarter of the greenhouse gases humans generate each year. I think this panel actually makes that point on its own, since half of us are speaking on behalf of solutions to systemic issues in the food service industry. Excited to be here alongside you, Jasmine, and I'm sure we'd both agree, no one makes a lock without a key, and every problem presents an even greater opportunity.

At Better Earth, we believe food, and the value chain around it, can be our silver bullet toward a better Earth, and where better to start than right here in our own community in Georgia? We're working steadily toward our goal of net zero emissions by 2030, focusing first, as a smaller and growing company, on reducing the carbon emissions within our supply chain. Our most recent achievement toward that was successfully launching domestic manufacturing infrastructure right here in the American Southeast, which dramatically reduces our supply chain's carbon emissions, creates long-term contracts for American farmers growing our raw materials in the region, and helps revitalize southern soil by growing naturally regenerative crops on formerly underutilized land.

But as a company seeking to advance both carbon drawdown and a circular economy, we can't stop there. We're also actively investing in commercial composting infrastructure across the Southeast, to responsibly dispose of our compostable packaging and support this linchpin solution toward drawdown. Project Drawdown actually flags composting as a critical solution that can sequester between two and three gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent. And while we have momentum, we can't solve problems this large on our own. We joined the Business Compact because it's so important for us to surround ourselves with a diverse community of like-minded Georgia companies, to share, ideate, and collaborate in a safe space. So often, the collaborative spirit of a business community gets stifled within our own internal organizations, out of fear that sharing means losing competitive edge or margin. I feel like that fear is exactly what got us into this mess in the first place. Now, more than ever, we need to come together and embrace radical transparency and vulnerability, in service of a shared vision for a better, safer, more sustainable future. I hope the Drawdown Georgia Business Compact is truly a pilot we can all scale together. Thanks so much for that question.

Maryam Alavi: That's wonderful, thank you. Josh, the same question.

Josh Raglin: To support our decarbonization strategy, Norfolk Southern set an ambitious target to reduce our scope one and scope two emissions intensity by 42% over a 15-year period, which is quite ambitious. The great news is we made a 7% improvement in that last year alone, driven primarily by improvements in locomotive fuel efficiency, which accounts for over 90% of our emissions. So that's really where we're focused, further modernizing our fleet and reducing emissions, but also partnering with our customers to help them reduce their own supply chain emissions. This is a growing concern for our customer base, rail is, on average, 75% less emissions-intensive than truck, so there's a huge opportunity there, and if you travel the interstate in Georgia, you can see what that opportunity looks like right here in our state. We definitely think we're part of the solution, but this is a big problem, and it's going to require a lot of collaboration across multiple industries. We're really excited about the Compact and about being here, and I look forward to learning from others involved.

Maryam Alavi: Great, thank you. Nick?

Nick Pearson: Thanks, Maryam. We're so excited about the Compact, for a number of reasons, but the collaboration piece really stands out. At Google, we consume about 19 terawatt-hours of energy globally every year, that's a lot, and we have aggressive objectives in place for 2030, around making sure we're being accountable to our consumers, our employees, our users, and our customers, both in how our products serve them and in how we're being accountable to the environment around us. One of the things I love about Drawdown is that it's going to create a platform for collaboration. We've learned a lot over three decades trying to address our footprint as a company, things we can share with other companies, things we've already shared with our users, but there's more we can learn too, we're not the only holders of knowledge on how to address these issues. That's part of what I love about Drawdown, the opportunity to meet with companies of varying sizes that have found new solutions, because, as Savannah said, this is a very serious issue, and it's well past time we're putting forth our full effort to address the dire climate issues we're seeing around the world.

Not only collaboration, but also innovation, we can't get there doing only what we've already done, we've got to find new tools and new ways to address climate change through carbon-free tools and carbon-free supplies. We're glad to see the federal government stepping its game up too, passing bills focused on research and development, key to finding the next ways to power our homes, our businesses, our cars, and transportation. We look forward to partnering not only with other companies and governments, but with our users and the people of Georgia, to help address these issues.

Maryam Alavi: Great, thank you. Jasmine? Oh, I think we might have lost her, I'm sure she'll get back on, so I'll move on to the next question. You started talking about the Compact as a model or platform for collaboration and technology innovation in the region, are there any specific examples or projects that come to mind that could really benefit from that kind of collaboration and innovation through the Compact?

Nick Pearson: Was that for me, Maryam?

Maryam Alavi: For anybody, this is a big question.

Nick Pearson: Well, since I'm unmuted, I'll go first. I think Georgia is really key, a true test bed for how we can address these issues. If you look just a couple of hours east of Atlanta, you can see Plant Vogtle, which will be the newest nuclear plant brought online in the U.S., a form of carbon-free energy that we support, and we're hopeful it comes online soon. But it's also important to look down the road, what's coming next, small modular reactors, advanced nuclear, geothermal? There are lots of different options out there, and what we're really focused on is providing funding, research and development know-how, and our employees' brainpower and experience across the tech sector and other parts of the economy, to find where the next solution is going to come from. That's the key piece, as we have those discussions with other companies, and with smart folks like the employees, professors, and students at Georgia Tech, it's really a prime opportunity to, and I hate to use the old adage, skate to where the puck is going, rather than just relying on what we've already done.

Maryam Alavi: Very good. I see Jasmine is back, so Jasmine, we wanted to give you the chance to respond to the previous question, about your organization's commitment to carbon reduction and how your Compact membership can advance it.

Jasmine Crowe: Yes, thanks, sorry about that, it said my network connection was lost. One of the biggest things we think about with carbon here at Goodr is that it starts in the house. If you ever come visit us, you'll see we have probably eight different receptacles here, and if anything ever ends up in the wrong one, you'll hear about it in our team chat. It really does start with how we operate as individuals, which carries into the company. We compost here, we recycle here, we even recycle styrofoam, and try not to use those materials in the facility at all. Another big piece of how we work at Goodr is that when we divert food waste from our business clients, we've built a nationwide nonprofit network that matches that food with a nonprofit within a very close radius. All of our donation deliveries end up either carbon neutral or carbon negative, because we're not driving past 30 different organizations to reach one, we're connecting really closely and efficiently.

I think being part of this collaborative is going to help, it's similar to when we became a B Corp in 2019, these are the things you do to stand behind what your business believes in. By joining this collaborative, Goodr and all 15 other companies who took this step are stating, and acting on, our commitment to these sustainable development goals. And I'd add that at Goodr, we don't even really look at 2030 goals, we always think about what we can do today, because 2030 can feel so far away that we think we have time, and the reality is we only have one planet, and it's deteriorating every single day. It's about what we do today that actually makes the future better for all of us. So we like to think about right now, rather than nine years out, and I'd encourage others to do the same.

Maryam Alavi: Very good, thank you. Let me go back to the question we started on. Nick gave us some very specific examples and ideas about how the Compact can serve as a model or platform for collaboration and technology innovation in the region, let me see if anyone else has ideas or examples in this area.

Savannah Seydel: I'd be happy to jump in, inspired by what you were saying, Nick. I'm thinking out loud here, but in a space with so much research from Georgia Tech and so much knowledge across the member companies, I think it'll be really valuable, speaking on behalf of a small, growing company, to learn best practices and ideas from others around engaging the third parties we often have to work with to support shipping and supply chain. Those scope two and three emissions, for smaller companies, those third parties are so much a part of how we run our business, and so much a part of our carbon emissions, so how do we get them to participate? I think those will be really fun conversations to have and explore as part of the Business Compact.

Maryam Alavi: Okay, this is what I call cold calling, years of teaching, you know. Does anyone else want to contribute or offer other examples? If not, we can move to the next question.

Josh Raglin: I'd just say, along the same lines as what Savannah shared, it's about how do we put more tools in our customers' hands, our consumers' and businesses' hands, to help them make good decisions around their supply chain. That's part of our goal, creating platforms where customers can actually see the emissions tied to their shipments, and understand the impact of decisions like modal shift. We're launching a number of digital platforms to help our customers do that, along with digital tools we've put in the hands of our own employees. Technology is part of our plan to improve not just efficiency and safety, but sustainability too, it's key, and part of our strategic plan going forward.

Maryam Alavi: Very good, any other comments? If not, I'm ready to move to the next question. In the introductions, each of you gave an overview of your company and the kinds of activities you're engaged in, so I want to give you the chance to share other specific company examples and ideas. Anyone?

Jasmine Crowe: I'll jump in. I definitely want to bring you all an idea from our work with Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Airport, we've been working with the airport since 2018, and, as you all know, jets and airplanes are huge carbon emitters. So when I started talking to the airport about working with Goodr, that was my vantage point, you're putting out so much carbon, let's capture some of it back. A lot of it comes down to education, and I want everyone to realize this isn't going to happen overnight. Being part of this collaborative and making these pledges is important, but we also have to educate a lot of people. One of the things we did was a sustainable food court initiative, getting every single concessionaire in the food court to convert to compostable materials. It was really hard, because for some concessionaires, compostable materials cost a bit more, and you have to show them, here's the ROI, you may not see it directly on your bottom line, but the environment sees it, and it's only a couple of cents more.

Really educating people whenever we can, I think, matters. One of the services Goodr offers is what we call trash talking, you can hire us, and we go to different customers and literally stand by the trash cans, the compost bins, the recycling bins, and educate everyday people about what happens when something compostable or recyclable ends up in a landfill bin. We let them know, do you know how long plastic sticks around, diapers never really break down, that kind of thing. A lot of it is just education, and we've had the chance to do that on so many occasions in the world's busiest airport, where millions of passengers pass through every day. Because we can make all the pledges we want, but, as Josh said, how do we actually empower our customers to join us on this journey? A lot of that is education, and we need to bring that to the table as we move forward on this mission, we can't do it alone.

Maryam Alavi: That's great, thank you so much. I'm going to ask the same question of all of you. My next question is, in addition to carbon reduction, the Compact is also very focused on ensuring beyond-carbon issues, like equity, are front and center. Given the increasing corporate focus on equity, how can the Compact advance impact in this area, alongside your own organizational goals? Let me start with Savannah.

Savannah Seydel: Sure, it'd be my pleasure, and I appreciate the question. I think that goes back to how authentic this initiative is to Georgia and the Georgia community, because this is such an important value here in the state, and should be an important part of any climate action conversation. At Better Earth, going back to what Jasmine said about starting at home, with your own team, we're proud to be located in Clarkston, Georgia, known as the most diverse square mile in the United States. We're also proud, in an industry, packaging and manufacturing, that skews a certain way, to have 75% of our team made up of women or underrepresented populations, something we take a lot of pride in. But it's a journey, and going back to collaboration, I'm really excited not just to share where we're at, but to learn through the Compact what we can do to keep supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and, most importantly, environmental justice, learning those best practices from others.

Maryam Alavi: Thank you so much. I'm going to ask the three of you who haven't responded yet to take a minute, no longer, to share your answers. Nick?

Josh Raglin: I'll just say, it's no surprise that a lot of our facilities across the state of Georgia sit in lower-income and minority communities, so our focus in those areas is really on what we can do to improve air quality for public health. We've had some great examples here in Georgia with our eco-locomotives, our public-private partnerships that reduce emissions by up to 75%. We're also partnering on overhead cranes to reduce their emissions. Anything we can do to provide cleaner air also means less noise for the communities we operate in, and we see that as key going forward in our decarbonization strategy, particularly in urban areas.

Maryam Alavi: Excellent. Nick, one minute.

Nick Pearson: I'll take my minute. For us, it's a two-pronged approach. Number one, through job creation, at Google we've committed to expanding our offices in areas where we know there are more diverse candidates. Atlanta is one of our hubs, along with Washington, D.C., Chicago, and New York City, where we're growing quickly and hiring, and our workforce is going to reflect the communities where we're based, including our Atlanta office right in Midtown, off West Peachtree. Since we're a company that's seen some success, we like to create jobs, and we need more talent. But that's not the only way we can have a positive impact on equity, beyond hiring, we're also creating tools that support small and medium-sized businesses, specifically those owned and founded by minorities. We think it's important to give them a platform to expand their reach and get the word out about what they're selling or the services they provide, which helps those owners and founders, and also creates the opportunity for them to hire more people, create more jobs, and have a positive impact on the economic development of their communities.

Maryam Alavi: Excellent, well, thank you, Nick, I drive by the Google office in Midtown Atlanta any time I come to campus. Jasmine?

Jasmine Crowe: When you think of equity, Goodr is 100% at the forefront of it. We're a Black woman-owned and founded company, 85% of our employees are women, and we really hit every spectrum. Beyond that, we're also certified as a women-owned business enterprise, a minority-owned business enterprise, and a disadvantaged business enterprise. Where I'd call something out is that sometimes it's really hard for us to actually do business with companies like Google or Norfolk Southern, so we really want to figure out how to get more equity and access to do business with customers like that. It's been hard, but at the core of what we do, we're all about equity and access, beyond just the fact that 85% of us are women and that we're a Black-founded company. Several of our team members are also HBCU graduates too, something we're really proud of.

Maryam Alavi: Excellent, well, thank you so much. This concludes our panel discussion. Before turning it over to audience questions, I'd like to thank our esteemed panelists for spending time with us today and sharing their insights. Your leadership is inspiring, and we've learned so much from you, you've provided many invaluable insights for the students, professionals, and executives attending this session. My sincere thanks also to Professor Beril Toktay and Michael Oxman, and the amazing team at the Ray C. Anderson Center, for their great work and many contributions to this significant topic of our time. Let me now turn it over for audience questions.

Dr. Beril Toktay: Thank you, Maryam, and we couldn't be doing all of this without your support and the Scheller College's excellent, committed staff, so a big thank you and shout-out to all of them. And to our center staff, a shout-out to David Eady, who's been tirelessly carrying this forward, along with the rest of our team. So thanks, everyone. You can drop your questions in the chat, and we'll share them with the panelists, please keep them coming.

First, we have a kind of affirmation of the work you're all doing on food waste, a note that says, "I read that a third of all food in the U.S. is thrown away, a very depressing statistic, when we have the ability to redistribute it to others in need, so thank you for the work you're doing," that's from Ross Maiwand. Elba is leading with a question: "Put your 2022 hat on, can you share the first sustainability action you'll be focused on moving into 2022?"

Michael Oxman: That's for everyone, I think.

Dr. Beril Toktay: To everyone, yeah.

Jasmine Crowe: I can share that Goodr is moving into a new facility, so as we start 2022, we're really making sure that facility is as sustainable as possible. We're thinking about lighting, water usage, materials, we're actually purchasing a lot of recycled materials, keeping things that would otherwise have ended up in a landfill and making new things out of them. You'll see a lot of that, similar to our plant walls, throughout our new office too. So for me, that's the first thing, making sure this new home is as sustainable as possible.

Josh Raglin: I'd say the same for Norfolk Southern, our new headquarters building in Midtown is launching in just a few weeks, most of our employees move in this January. It's expected to be Gold LEED certified, we're collecting 100% of the stormwater on the property, and it's very energy efficient, it'll be a wonderful environment for our employees. Even though we've had operations in Georgia for over 150 years, moving our headquarters here is an exciting time for our company, and for how we continue to engage with the community.

Dr. Beril Toktay: Thank you. If either Savannah or Nick would like to share, that would be great to hear.

Savannah Seydel: Sure, I'm happy to add in. I was mulling this question over, and thinking about January, actually, in late January we'll be in Texas at the U.S. Composting Council's big conference, Compost 2022, engaging with composters around the country. As a circular company, it's incredibly important for us to understand the needs, barriers, obstacles, and opportunities to support that whole cycle, from field to fork to field. So we're really excited to engage with composters in January, and better understand their current barriers and how compostable products companies can support them. That's an immediate priority for us.

Nick Pearson: I'll go quickly, I agree with everything my fellow panelists have said, but I'd really emphasize what Jasmine pointed out, that we can't look too far down the road, we have to focus on now. While we've got goals and plans in place for 2022, we're operating now, and part of that is sharing the stories of what we're learning in the field, both at our data centers and our campuses globally. We're headed to COP26 in Glasgow, and we're encouraging and imploring world leaders to step up too, to put policies and laws in place that will make a positive impact on climate. That's something we're doing now, and will keep focusing on going into 2022, because it's important that we have technology and innovation making it easier to green up our global footprint, but also important to have rules, regulations, and laws that help set guideposts. That's something we're focused on now, and will keep being focused on in 2022.

Dr. Beril Toktay: What you're saying is so important, about what companies leading in this space are lobbying for, at multiple levels of government. You said this is your call to world leaders, can you share some specific ways you're engaging in the U.S. to move the regulatory landscape toward being more conducive to these innovations and technologies?

Nick Pearson: More than happy to, I won't belabor the point, but we've been working with the administration on their 24/7 carbon-free goal, which we're hoping they'll sign an executive order on in the next few months. We've been sharing insights from our own pursuit of that goal at Google, and how it could be spread to the federal government more broadly, we think that's an important part of the conversations we're having with the Biden administration, and they've been good conversations. But it really comes down to where the rubber meets the road, we've supported the climate provisions in the current legislative packages before Congress, the Build Back Better plan, the clean energy tax breaks, which we think are very key for the producers out there supplying a significant amount of the sources companies like ours use. We want to see this happen, we've put our government affairs team out advocating for these bills and provisions, and we're hopeful Congress will get this done and across the finish line quickly.

Dr. Beril Toktay: There are lots of audience questions, so I'm torn between a follow-up on that, but maybe that's for another panel. Regionally, what are some expectations you'd love to see from state and local government? If any of you want to speak to that quickly, please do, then we'll jump back to audience questions.

Savannah Seydel: I'll just add that I think there's a lot of opportunity in legislation around packaging at the regional and city level, that's actually where things have been incredibly dynamic. You're seeing single-use plastic bans growing exponentially in cities across the country, and, statewide, packaging labeling bills and extended producer responsibility bills as well. This legislation around packaging is really coming to the forefront, and I think there's still a lot all of us are going to keep learning in this space. I think this Drawdown Compact is going to be such an exciting space for us to share what we're learning across our different verticals, and learn from each other as we keep growing in this area, so I'll continue tracking that local and statewide legislative landscape.

Dr. Beril Toktay: Thank you. Michael, over to you for continuing responses.

Jasmine Crowe: I'll just quickly add on to what Savannah said, we're seeing a lot of legislation in other states around food waste. In California, starting January 2022, SB 1383 goes into effect, which fines businesses for not donating edible food to people in need, and requires diverting up to 75% of their food waste. If you were looking at a pie chart of food waste, about 70% is still just being wasted, about 27% gets recycled in some fashion, and only two to three percent actually gets donated. After what we all saw in 2020, with people lined up around the block for food banks and access to food, I do think legislation requiring businesses to give edible food to people in need is going to be paramount. A lot of companies tout prevention, "we've prevented this many pounds of food from going to waste," but what it's really about is diversion, because source reduction is one thing, but if you're still producing waste, that's something you've got to be held accountable for. I'm hopeful the SEC's new rule will take effect by the end of the year, requiring public companies to report on their sustainability efforts, especially around food waste and diversion, because, as Project Drawdown has already stated, this is one of the top things we can do to combat climate change, and I just don't think people are taking it seriously enough yet.

Dr. Beril Toktay: Thanks for sharing that, Jasmine.

Michael Oxman: Thank you, Jasmine. There's a question here from Molly Samuel I wanted to address, she asks, can you share specifics on how the businesses will actually work together, and how you'll track and measure progress toward the net zero goal? I'm happy to take a quick pass at that, and then welcome responses from our panelists. As we launch the Compact and move into doing the work, there are several activities we anticipate moving forward. One is developing collaborative projects that Compact participants can engage in, ideas that may come directly from participants or from partners we're working with, one example being Southface Energy Institute here in Atlanta, and we'd anticipate ideas from organizations like them and others too. Those ideas could be anything from common challenges, like how do we get enough EV infrastructure in place, how can we do more around conservation agriculture, how do we expand large-scale solar.

We're also looking at how we really facilitate innovation in this space, so we can scale these solutions, and there are a number of ways to do that. One is working with companies and their employees on sustainability ideas and innovations, another is potentially seeding startups that might come out of mentoring or out of the Compact itself, and then there's a whole range of potential student engagement that can focus on innovation too. The third area is the community of practice, how do we learn from each other? We've got a diverse group of companies here that can really complement one another, we work better as a collective, coming from different industries, different sizes, different parts of the state. So making sure we're actually creating a platform for those best practices to be exchanged matters a lot.

On the reporting question, this is something we're already working on as we build out the Compact, making sure we're actually able to measure progress. As a requirement of joining the Compact, companies agree to report annually on their activities, including participating in at least one collaborative initiative across the Compact. The specifics of that reporting are still being worked through, but we recognize it as a really important question. With that, I'm going to transition to another question, from Jonathan Siskin, and I'm going to make the panelists answer this one. There seem to be growing concerns around greenwashing, what are ways the sustainability community can drive accountability and transparency, and how do we keep building trust while creating real impact? I have my own opinions, but I think I should stop talking and let you all talk. Anyone?

Savannah Seydel: I'm happy to start, since this is something I think is rampant in the packaging industry. I don't know about the rest of you, but I get overwhelmed going to the grocery store, choosing between all the different "natural" products, or seeing words like "oxo-biodegradable," I don't even know what that means. It's honestly ridiculous what's happening, and it's a little scary. So I think I'm excited to share with the Compact what we've been learning as we continue to rethink packaging every single day, hopefully it saves someone in the Compact some time as they're navigating decisions for their own products or companies. Just as an example, and a quick plug for everyone listening, there are some regulations and structures in place to help combat greenwashing, especially in packaging. Never trust the word "biodegradable" on its own, it's not legally binding. I'm biodegradable, this computer I'm talking on is biodegradable, there's just no sense of a bound timeframe, it's only however many eons it would take to actually break down. The term "compostable," though, is legally bound, and defined by third-party certifications requiring it to compost safely, adding nutrients back to our soil, in under 90 days. When you see that term, you can feel confident it's operating under real legal accountability. So all this to say, these are the kinds of things we all have to navigate constantly, and it can be exhausting, so I hope to keep sharing what we're learning with others, and I'm sure I'll learn a lot from other Compact members too, and hopefully we can summarize some of those insights and share them publicly with consumers as well.

Nick Pearson: Thanks, Savannah, I'll step in here quickly. I agree with everything Savannah said, and I'll echo what Jasmine said earlier about the SEC and the rules they're currently considering, transparency is so key here. It's really important that, as we collaborate across companies, we're being honest with ourselves about what we're actually doing, and also sharing the best practices we do have in place. But, again, what Jasmine said is spot on, as we see these rules and regulations coming into place, we're encouraging real teeth behind them, that they're actually calling on public companies to do their part, not just with words, but with actions.

Dr. Beril Toktay: Thank you so much for that. I think we're approaching the wrap-up, I just want to highlight a couple more comments from the chat. One is from a student asking whether there will be opportunities to engage and support this from a non-business perspective, and yes, we'll do our best to engage students at various points that both contribute to their learning and to the strategy implementation of firms. There's another question, from Akisi Stokes: "Have you considered the need for strategies to support potential capacity and cost barriers for small businesses to comply with carbon neutral initiatives?" I want to highlight that, at Georgia Tech, we like to say we have global impact, but the local impact we're having, and can have, matters just as much. We're an anchor institution, and we're taking that seriously, so as we rolled out this Compact, we were very conscious, as Michael said, about reaching out to smaller businesses too. Over time, we hope smaller and medium-sized enterprises will join and become part of this community of practice, and reduce their cost and expertise barriers and other challenges by benefiting from that community of practice, best practices, tools, and access to students that we're building here. That's a real goal of ours, and we're looking to all of you to help us figure out that strategy.

So, I guess we can tag-team this closing. We'd like to thank all the panelists and all the participants, with apologies to those whose questions we couldn't get to, for your partnership and engagement, and we invite you to follow us on social media, and to join the Compact, or lobby your own organization to join, if you haven't already. We'd also like to point out we have a few upcoming events, and I'll pass it to Michael to close us out with those.

Michael Oxman: Yes, we'd welcome having you back, and bringing your friends and family too. On Tuesday, November 16th, from two to three p.m., we'll have an event called Equitable and Inclusive Innovation for Georgia Climate Action, moderated by Kay Husband-Stallings, dean and Ivan Allen Jr. Chair at the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts here at Georgia Tech. Then, on Thursday, November 18th, from eleven to twelve-thirty, we'll have a panel called Research to Action: Three Climate Solutions for Georgia, moderated by Dr. Marilyn Brown, Regents' and Brook Byers Professor of Sustainable Systems, who also served as lead PI for the Drawdown solutions research. We're also pulling together a final event, more networking and student-focused, sometime in January, that all Compact members will be invited to join. And, as Beril said, if you're a company interested in joining the Compact, we'd certainly welcome having you aboard, and if you're an individual or other stakeholder, we welcome your outreach and support in any way you'd like to engage.

With that, I think we're right on time, I wish we had another hour with these panelists. I want to thank Josh, Savannah, Nick, and Jasmine, your engagement is very much appreciated, we really enjoyed this conversation and look forward to more.

Dr. Beril Toktay: Thank you, thank you all.

Michael Oxman: Thank you so much.

Nick Pearson: Go Braves. Thank you.

Dr. Beril Toktay: Go Braves, indeed, indeed.

Nick Pearson: Thanks, everyone.

Dr. Beril Toktay: Thank you.