A Multi-Method Analysis of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Websites of Fortune 500 Agricultural and Food Companies

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Abstract

Each year, Fortune magazine publishes a list of the 500 largest corporations in the United States of America based on total revenue in the previous fiscal year. As successful companies, these organizations must prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for a multitude of reasons. The purpose of this study was to determine how agricultural and food companies on the 2021 Fortune 500 list demonstrated a commitment to DEI efforts on their corporate websites. Thus, we analyzed the DEI website of each food and agricultural company listed on the 2021 Fortune 500 list. Quantitatively, most websites only required two clicks to access resources and information regarding how the company supports diverse audiences in the workplace when navigating from the main corporate website. Corporations should ensure DEI is a priority for and clearly communicate this on the website using definitions, statements, and employee resources on websites. Additionally, using visuals such as photos, videos, and graphics can improve communication in this space. For the qualitative portion of the study, we analyzed the use of executive and employee voices in communicating about DEI on the corporate landing page. Two themes emerged. Within the corporate theme came the work-to-be-done subtheme which addresses corporate DEI work as a work in progress. The second theme was the personal and professional theme which helps support the personal and professional wellbeing of employees and stakeholders. We offer suggestions for communicators and executives for communicating about DEI in the food and agriculture webspace and offer recommendations for future research

Keywords

Introduction

Each year, *Fortune* magazine compiles and publishes a list of the 500 largest corporations in the United States of America based on total revenue in the previous fiscal year (*Fortune*, 2021). First created in 1955 by Editor, Edgar P. Smith (*The New York Times*, 1989), being listed on the *Fortune* 500 is commonly viewed as prestigious as these companies are the most successful businesses in the U.S. (Liu et al., 2017).

As corporations viewed as successful, these organizations must prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for a multitude of reasons (Ravazzani, 2018). One reason for prioritizing DEI is that it allows for access to a more diverse workforce (Ravazzani, 2018; Kincannon & Reed, 2021). Diversity management is a strategic process where an organization uses all of the potential its employees bring by creating an inclusive environment (Ravazzani, 2018). Food and agricultural companies have historically lagged other industries with regard to committing to fostering diversity in the workplace and prioritizing DEI efforts (Kincannon & Reed, 2021). For example, each year the Human Rights Campaign releases its Corporate Equality Index (HRC, 2022). Rating criteria for this index includes the inclusion of nondiscrimination policies across business entities, equitable benefits for LGBTQ+ workers and their families, supporting inclusive culture, and corporate social responsibility (HRC, 2022). In 2022, zero agricultural or food companies received a 100% rating from the HRC (HRC, 2022).

Previous literature has investigated how organizations and companies demonstrate a commitment to DEI using corporate or organizational websites as the unit of measurement. Montenegro (2020) examined how public relations organizations demonstrated a commitment to DEI via content analysis of PR websites, and Point & Singh (2003) analyzed diversity statements found on corporate European websites. A common finding across the literature clearly indicates that an accessible demonstration of a company or organization's commitment to DEI plays a significant role in attracting and maintaining diverse talent (Bonaiuto, et al., 2013; Montenegro, 2020; Point & Singh, 2003; Alruwaili, 2018). Thus, this study sought to understand how food and agricultural companies were using DEI landing pages to communicate about DEI efforts to current and future employees and stakeholders.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are three terms that are commonly grouped together when addressing how a company, organization, group, etc. creates an environment that is welcoming and appreciative of all people (What is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?, n.d.). Often confused or misused, DEI should first be defined:

"Diversity is the presence of differences that may include race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, (dis)ability, age, [an/or] religious commitment," (What is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?, n.d.. para. 1). "Equity is promoting justice, impartiality, and fairness within procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems," (What is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?, n.d., para. 2). Finally, "inclusion is an outcome to ensure those that are diverse actually feel and/or are welcomed," (What is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?, n.d., para. 3).

More and more, business leaders are seeing DEI work as a way to revitalize their organization (Beach & Segars, 2022). Multiple scholars have identified that gender, racial, and ethnic diversity all have financial benefits for companies (Herring, 2017; Hunt et al., 2015). Innovation can be driven by diversity; thus, corporate leaders see the potential that could be provided by engaging the entire workforce in DEI efforts (Beach & Segars, 2022). Further, companies that land in the top quarter for gender, racial, and ethnic diversity metrics have been

found to have higher financial returns than the industrial mean in their country (Hunt et al., 2018).

Not only can increasing DEI work be financially beneficial for a company, but previous literature has indicated that increased diversity in the workplace can also improve problem-solving abilities and creativity (Cox, 1993; Herring & Henderson, 2015). Additionally, prioritizing DEI work and visibility has a strong positive impact on areas such as community development, internal culture, and corporate reputation (Chohan, 2017). Specifically, racial and gender diversity have been shown to have a positive impact on a company's reputation and the practices they put in place related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Bear, 2010).

Previous research surrounding DEI work visibility on websites has investigated the dimensions of diversity exhibited on websites. Montenegro (2020) found that the diversity of skills and professional backgrounds were the most frequently demonstrated dimension of diversity on public relations agency websites. They concluded that agencies commonly address diversity from a dimension of competencies and knowledge rather than racial, ethnic, or cultural diversity.

Point & Singh (2003) analyzed corporate online diversity statements across companies in eight European countries. In analyzing these statements, they uncovered that companies use a variety of dimensions of diversity that covers a great deal of individual differences including gender and race, but also other differences that might be both visible and not visible (Point & Singh, 2003). They further found that with the exception of the United Kingdom, management of diversity is not a prominent discourse among companies in Europe. In contrast, roughly one third of the top companies in Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, and France ignored diversity on their websites (Point & Singh, 2003).

Finally, Bal and Sharik (2018) quantitatively analyzed student and faculty diversity representation on university forestry and related natural resources landing webpages in the United States. This analysis examined the visual representations of diversity on the university websites including perceived gender, race, role, and location (Bal & Sharik, 2018). They found there was a significant uneven distribution between representation of both race and gender on the websites. Thus, they suggested that as we move forward to a more minority-majority nation by 2040 (Colby & Ortman, 2015; Frey, 2018) having diversity of individuals represented on websites could encourage prospective students to pursue careers in forestry and natural resources, thus ensuring the industry is meeting the demands of the growingly diverse population (Bal & Sharik, 2018).

While significant work has been done to better understand DEI in the corporate workplace, the literature is silent regarding DEI in the specific context of food and agriculture. Contributing over $1.2 trillion dollars to the U.S. economy, the workforce within food and agriculture plays a vital role in our economy (USDA, 2023). As more jobs are created and opportunities expand in other industries, agriculture must evolve and make reaching diverse audiences and providing an equitable workplace a priority (Kincannon & Reed, 2021). This study sought to describe how agriculture and food companies on the Fortune 500 list prioritized DEI via communication on their corporate websites.

Conceptual Framework

This study was conceptualized using the MERIT framework for valuing DEI work. (Creary, 2020). By following these, companies and organizations can better ensure they are

attracting and maintaining diverse talent (Creary, 2020). Broken down, the MERIT framework suggests the following:

Make DEI goals and work actionable.

Elevate DEI work internally and externally.

Require leaders to participate in DEI work.

Identify leaders and non-managerial employees willing to serve as DEI sponsors.

Treat DEI work as a core rather than a peripheral work.

In the 1960's we first saw more formal training related to DEI and initiatives (Zepponi, 2022). In the past two decades, we have seen a significant rise in DEI efforts within the largest corporations in the U.S. (Zepponi, 2022). One way businesses elevate their DEI work is through highlighting this work through the various communication channels used. Focusing on corporate websites in this study allows us to evaluate how these companies used a piece of owned media to elevate DEI work with their target audiences.

This study was also conceptualized using Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR was first adopted by American economist Howard Bowen in 1943 and proposes that by incorporating CSR, businesses can reach goals of social justice and economic prosperity by creating welfare for a broad range of social groups (Bowen, 1943). Bowen attributes developments made in both transportation and mass communication as the main factors that brought significant attention to social issues and influenced how the public now demands the government address inequality (Bowen, 1943). Today, this model is being replicated within corporations in a similar way in which it was used by the government (Zepponi, 2022). While it originally started with corporations that held increasing amounts of power and influence on the public, today we see even small companies being held to this higher standard and CSR being incorporated as a common guiding principle among companies (Zepponi, 2022).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine how agricultural and food companies on the 2021 *Fortune 500* list demonstrated a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts on their corporate websites. The following research objectives guided this study.

RO1) Describe the accessibility of diversity, equity, and inclusion landing pages of agricultural and food companies on the 2021 *Fortune 500* list.

RO2) Describe the content on diversity, equity, and inclusion landing pages of agricultural and food companies on the 2021 *Fortune 500* list.

RO3) Describe the use of executive and employee voices on diversity, equity, and inclusion landing pages of agricultural and food companies on the 2021 *Fortune 500* list.

Methods

We conducted a multi-methods content analysis of the website of each company listed on the 2021 *Fortune 500* list. A multi-methods approach allowed for us to assign real, numerical values to the accessibility of and content on the websites, while also exploring how company voices were used to communicate about DEI. The literature was silent on the use of qualitative content analysis in DEI work and visibility in corporate settings.

We used quantitative content analysis to address RO1 and RO2 and qualitative content analysis to address RO3. Sixteen companies were identified from the 2021 *Fortune 500* list as being an agricultural or food company. Companies on the list were identified as food or agricultural if the primary function was production and or merchandising of products identified as food or agriculture by the USDA (USDA, 2023). Restaurants were excluded as they are recognized as a part of the hospitality industry (USDA, 2023). However, upon starting data analysis, one company did not have a page dedicated to its DEI efforts, thus it was removed from the population leaving a total of N = 15 companies in the population.

To address RO1, quantitative content analysis was used to evaluate the click-through rate of websites starting from the main landing page of the corporate website. Prior research (Steede et al., 2018; Arnold et al., 2012) has used click-through rate to determine accessibility of information embedded on websites. Websites were analyzed using one scale-level variable to determine the number of clicks needed to take a user from the primary corporate landing page to resources and information regarding the company's DEI commitments and efforts. This variable was guided by codebooks used in previous research regarding website resource and information accessibility (Steede et al., 2018; Arnold et al., 2012).

To address RO2, a quantitative content analysis was conducted on the primary DEI landing page of each company's website. We developed the codebook based on previous literature (Montenegro, 2020; Point & Singh, 2003; Bal & Sharik, 2018), the MERIT framework for evaluating DEI (Creary, 2020), and Corporate Social Responsibility (Bowen, 1943). After developing the codebook, coder training was completed and both researchers analyzed all 15 websites. With such a small sample, it is recommended that both coders code all data to determine intercoder reliability (Riffe, et al., 2014). After coding was completed, an acceptable Krippendorff's alpha level of .80 or greater was established across all variables (Riffe, et al., 2014).

The unit of analysis was the corporate DEI website. Following the methods Govers and Go, webpage-level analysis was chosen for this study (2004). Variables measured in this study were the following:

Fortune 500 List Ranking: What is the ranking of the company on the *Fortune 500* list.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Statement: Does the website have a clear DEI statement? (Binary variable)

Defines DEI: Does the website define DEI for the visitor? (Binary variable)

Use of "Diversity" term: Does the website use the term "diversity" in its communication? (Binary variable)

Use of "Equity" term: Does the website use the term "equity" in its communication? (Binary variable)

Use of "Inclusion" term: Does the website use the term "inclusion" in its communication? (Binary variable)

Use of other terms: Does the website use other language other than diversity, equity, and inclusion in its communication? (Binary variable)

Employee Resource Groups: How many employee resource groups does the company advertise to have on its website?

DEI in Corporate Mission Statement: Does the company's mission statement mention a commitment to DEI? (Binary variable)

Quotes from Employees: Does the website incorporate direct quotes from employees on its DEI website? (Binary variable)

Internal Resource Links: Does the website provide links to internal resources for visitors related to DEI? (Binary variable)

External Resource Links: Does the website provide links to external resources for visitors related to DEI? (Binary variable)

Use of Executive Voices: Does the website use direct quotes from clearly identified company executives to communicate about DEI? (Binary variable)

Use of Video: Does the website have one or more videos that discuss the company's commitment to DEI? (Binary variable)

Use of Photography: Does the website have one or more photos that discuss the company's commitment to DEI? (Binary variable)

Use of Graphics: Does the website have one or more illustrations that discuss the company's commitment to DEI (Binary variable)

Finally, in order to address RO3, qualitative content analysis was conducted on the primary DEI landing page of each company's website. Direct quotes communicated in writing or via audio or video were recorded for analysis. Additionally, quotes were identified as either coming from an executive or a non-executive of the company. Of the 15 DEI landing pages analyzed, only seven had direct quotes from either executives or employees. The remaining communication came from the corporate voice. Direct quotes were pulled from each website and coded as either coming from an executive or an employee. Each company was then given a pseudonym prior to coding the data. We then used Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software program (Salmona, et al., 2019), to code the data using a constant comparative method where quotes were coded for emergent themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

We strengthened confirmability and dependability of the results by using audit trails to detail the theme formation (MacQueen, et al, 1998). Additionally, data analysis debriefing

sessions were used to reduce bias (Guba, 1981). However, researcher bias can never be fully removed. One member of the research team does identify as a member of a population directly served by DEI efforts while the other member serves committees to advance DEI efforts. Thus, the lived experience of these researchers helped conceptualize this study and played a role in the coding of the data.

While this is a case study of only agricultural and food companies on the 2021 Fortune 500 list, transferability across other agricultural and food companies was established using long, detailed quotes where appropriate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These findings are limited to the content held on the websites at the time of data collection (MacQueen, et al, 1998).

Results

RO1) Describe the accessibility of diversity, equity, and inclusion landing pages of agricultural and food companies on the 2021 *Fortune 500* list.

In order to address the research objective, frequency of clicks to access the primary page of information regarding the company's DEI information, resources, and statement was recorded. Total clicks ranged from 1 – 3 clicks, however one company had no website that discussed DEI commitments or resources. Two (13.3%) companies had direct links to DEI landing pages listed on the primary corporate website and one company (6.6%) required three clicks to get to the DEI landing page. Twelve company websites required two clicks (80%) to get to the DEI landing page. It is important to note, however, that three websites that required two clicks did make accessing the information more challenging. Two companies placed the DEI landing page within the "Careers" tab, and another held its DEI landing page on a separate corporate website from its primary business website.

RO2) Describe the content on diversity, equity, and inclusion landing pages of agricultural and food companies on the 2021 *Fortune 500* list.

In order to address the research objective, descriptive data was collected to describe the content hosted on the DEI webpage of each company. Agricultural and food companies ranked on the 2021 *Fortune 500* list ranged from #73 to #431. Thus, two companies ultimately made the *Fortune 100* list this year. Table 1 outlines the ranking of each company analyzed.

Table 1
Rankings of Agricultural & Food Companies on the 2021 Fortune 500 List (N = 15)

Company Name	Ranking
Tyson Foods	73
Deere & Company	87
CHS Inc.	103
United Natural Foods	107
Kraft Heinz	110
Performance Food Group	114
US Foods Holdings	128
General Mills	169
Corteva, Inc.	214

Land O'Lakes	219
Kellogg's	222
Conagra Brands	283
Tractor Supply	291
Hormel Foods	317
Seaboard Foods	406
Zoetis	431

Next, we analyzed landing pages to determine if the companies had a clearly defined statement regarding a commitment to DEI. Two of the $N = 15$ (13.3%) websites did not include a clearly defined statement regarding a commitment to DEI despite having an entire webpage dedicated to information about DEI. Despite the vast majority of websites providing a DEI statement, only eight websites (53.3%) provided a definition of either diversity, equity, and/or inclusion and only three websites (20%) included a clear commitment to DEI in the corporate mission statement.

We additionally analyzed specific language used on the websites when communicating about this topic. All 15 websites analyzed used the terms "diversity" and "inclusion" on the corporate landing page, however, just $n = 9$ (60%) used the word "equity" when communicating on the corporate DEI landing page. Further, three websites used other terms outside of diversity, equity, and inclusion on the landing page such as belonging and equality.

Regarding employee resources, 11 webpages (73.3%) clearly outlined Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) available. However, four companies either do not offer ERGs or did not list the available ERGs on the corporate DEI webpage. Among the companies that outlined available ERGs, the number available ranged from 5 – 12 ERGs. Finally, we analyzed the availability of internal and external resource links on each website. The majority of websites (86.6%) included internal resource links while only three websites (20%) included links to external resources for employees.

To more broadly understand each company's commitment to DEI, we analyzed corporate mission statements for the inclusion of DEI as a value the company works to uphold in its overall mission. Unfortunately, only three companies (20%) identified DEI as central to the corporate mission. Next, we analyzed the use of employee and executive direct quotes on the DEI landing pages. There was an almost even split among the companies as eight (53.3%) included quotes from employees on the landing page and seven (46.6%) did not include quotes from employees on the landing page. The use of executive quotes was similar, as again $n = 8$ (53.3%) websites included direct quotes and $n = 7$ (46.6%) websites did not.

Finally, we analyzed each website for the use of photos, videos, and illustrations. All $n = 15$ websites included photos on the DEI landing page, however only four (26.6%) included videos and illustrations. Table 3 outlines the use of photos, videos, and illustrations on each of the corporate DEI landing pages.

Table 3

Use of Photos, Videos, and Illustrations on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Landing Page of Agricultural and Food Companies Listed on the 2021 Fortune 500 List (N = 15)

Form of Communication	Total	%
Photos	15	100.0
Videos	4	26.6
Illustrations	4	26.6

RO3) Describe the use of executive and employee voices to discuss the work of DEI on diversity, equity, and inclusion landing pages of agricultural and food companies on the 2021 *Fortune 500* list.

In order to address the research objective, open coding was used to determine emergent themes among the executive and non-executive voices used on corporate DEI websites. The first theme to emerge was the *corporate theme*. In this theme, DEI work is described as important to the company and beneficial for company goals.

Corporate Theme

An executive from Company A described DEI work as core to its values: "Inclusion is a core value at [Company A] and living that value has never been more important. We cannot just say the words; modeling inclusive behavior is how we can positively impact our community." An executive from Company C said, "We believe a diverse mix of voices leads to better discussions, decisions, and outcomes for [Company C] and the customers we serve." This executive from Company C went on to say,

> Our belief in Diversity & Inclusion, weaved within our enterprise, creates a positive environment where all voices are heard, the beauty of our differences is embraced, and the relationship with the communities and businesses we serve and touch every day are nurtured. I am proud to represent the purposeful and impactful work we are guiding to create a great place to work.

The commitment to DEI as core to the corporate mission was further discussed by an executive from Company D as the "right thing to do." They went on to say,

> Boldly embracing inclusion, diversity, and equity is the only way we will achieve our true potential as an organization. These efforts are core to our values and our ability to deliver innovative breakthroughs for our customers, fully leverage the expertise of our suppliers and small business partners and foster a culture in which all of our people flourish. We will not be able to achieve our true potential as an organization and deliver our purpose and mission without strong improvements to ID&E.

Finally, executives from Company F and Company G discussed DEI work as both a journey, but also vital to the organization. A Company F executive said, "Along this journey, it is imperative that we prioritize D&I, have a clear vision of what success looks like and work

together to reinforce a sense of belonging throughout our organization." While a Company G executive said:

> We are committed to providing a diverse and inclusive culture where we foster different perspectives, ideas and innovative thinking. One of our values is respect – the starting point for our diversity and inclusion efforts. Our strong culture is our values in action, and we truly care about each other and working together as part of the [Company G] family.

While the primary emergent theme was that DEI was core to these corporate missions, a subtheme was identified that indicated these agricultural and food companies recognize there is *work to be done* to make food and agriculture a welcoming place for people of diverse backgrounds.

Work to be Done
An executive from Company C discusses this work,

> We recognize that we have a great deal of work ahead of us on our journey to being a more inclusive workplace, with greater diverse representation at our senior leadership levels. I am committed to continuing to make progress toward our D&I goals of creating a more inclusive work environment, increasing the diversity of our workforce and leaders, and supporting diverse communities and businesses.

An executive from Company D highlights how this work pushes the company toward its true potential, "We will not be able to achieve our true potential as an organization and deliver our purpose and mission without strong improvements to ID&E." They went on to say how this work is a part of a journey, but necessary for a strong foundation, "We are on a journey and there is plenty of work to still do, but I am very energized by this strong foundation we have put in place – one that will pave the way for continued process as we move forward."

An executive from Company E reflected on how it continually works to make the workplace welcoming to everyone:

> For more than a decade, we have documented our company's process in these areas through our annual [Report]. Each year, [Report] brings to life our ongoing efforts to ensure everyone around our Company E world has a place at the table from our employees and vendors to the consumer, customers, and communities we serve.

While Company E recognizes its work, it also recognizes it has further steps to take:

> We are very proud of our progress and excited about our journey toward maintaining an equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace. I hope you will take the time to read this year's features report and please encourage others, both inside and outside our company to read it as well. It's a true snapshot of our culture and proof that Company E invests in its people around the world every day.

The second theme to emerge was that DEI work was important to the *personal and professional growth* of employees.

Personal and Professional Growth
A non-executive from Company A said:

> Inclusion matters to me because it's a major contribution factor to my career development and overall wellness. It's important that I'm part of a work culture where I can be my authentic self, my voice is lifted up and I'm afforded access to equal opportunities. Without inclusion, none of that is possible.

An executive from Company B discussed how DEI work ultimately improves the work-life of everyone:

> [Company B] values the variety of talents, backgrounds, and perspectives of our associates, as individuals and at a group level. We support an inclusive work environment in which diversity is recognized, valued, and embraced and respect the unique characteristics each associate brings to our company. These differences inspire better thinking, creativity, and problem-solving.

An executive from Company C discussed this in relation to company culture, "[Company C] is committed to a culture focused on our associate's growth." A non-executive of Company A additionally added, "It's important that I'm part of a work culture where I can be my authentic self, my voice is lifted up and I'm afforded access to equal opportunities. Without inclusion, none of that is possible."
Another non-executive from Company A felt that the DEI work from leaders made them feel empowered:

> One of the reasons I enjoy working here is because of how intentional leaders from all levels are about letting every voice be heard. Even VPs in the room will stop and ask me what I think. Not only has this built my confidence but has also pushed me to articulate my own opinions on a number of topics.

An executive from Company D discussed how this work can be challenging, but valuable for each individual: "We all have spaces around ID&E where we feel a little bit uncomfortable. Lean into those tough conversations and those uncomfortable feelings. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know something or that you made a mistake." Finally, a non-executive from Company D said, "To me, as a minority, this dialogue matters because it creates that invitation to be open, to be authentic, and we hope to be ourselves."

Discussion, Conclusions, & Recommendations

While little research has been conducted that investigates DEI in corporate agricultural and food companies, this study does offer some insight and hope for corporate agriculture and food. Twenty years ago, Point & Singh (2003) found that management of DEI on the corporate

website was not prominent within most European companies outside of the United Kingdom. In contrast, all but one company analyzed in our study had some website-level management of DEI.

The vast majority of websites only required two clicks to access resources and information regarding how the company supports diverse audiences in the workplace. While landing pages such as this can be performative at times, the visibility of such resources can provide some indication to prospective employees and stakeholders as to the company culture surrounding DEI and the direction in which the company is going (Dijkshoorn, 2018).

By providing an accessible location to identify a company's DEI statement and goals, a company is following the pattern outlined in the MERIT framework of elevating DEI work externally (Creary, 2020). Potential employees and stakeholders are then able to assess the corporate commitment to DEI. These DEI landing pages further elevate DEI work internally for employees by providing a location for them to identify resources the company provides for marginalized groups. Resources such as employee resource groups can play a significant role in maintaining diverse talent – which is often missing in the agricultural and food space (Kincannon & Reed, 2021). When corporate communicators make DEI information easily accessible on the corporate website this can elevate the "E" in the MERIT framework and communicate to desired audiences a company's commitment to CSR. Apart from one company, most agricultural and food companies had accessible information regarding DEI efforts and information. It is recommended that all companies identify DEI work as a priority and elevate this commitment internally and externally (Creary, 2020). Ideally, a company would elevate this work by providing a direct link on the corporate website rather than requiring two or more clicks to identify this information.

With regard to the content hosted on these websites, corporations should ensure that DEI is a priority for the company and corporate communicators should ensure this commitment is clearly communicated with definitions, corporate commitments, and employee resources on websites (Ravazzani, 2018). Each of these play a significant role in diversity management and a company can further increase its pool of diverse talent and support its current employees by ensuring information sought after by employees and prospective employees is readily available (Montenegro, 2020; Point & Singh, 2003). While most companies provided a DEI statement, only just over half provided a definition of either diversity, equity, and/or inclusion. While individuals seeking out this information may have general knowledge of the topic, clearly defining these can help make DEI goals and work more actionable while also treating DEI work as core to the mission (Creary, 2020).

Additionally, we analyzed the inclusion of ERGs available to employees. Only four companies did not clearly outline the ERGs available to employees, thus indicating most are working to elevate these groups and the work they do – core to the "E" of the MERIT framework (Creary, 2020). The inclusion of these ERGs further indicates a company's commitment to CSR by creating opportunities for a broad range of social groups (Bowen, 1943).

We also analyzed corporate mission statements for the inclusion of DEI as a core value of the company. Only three companies included DEI as a central portion of their corporate mission. By omitting DEI work from the corporate mission, these companies are failing on the "T" of the MERIT framework – thus not treating DEI work as core to the mission, but rather as peripheral work (Creary, 2020). The absence of DEI work as a core to the mission of the company can push these companies away from prioritizing DEI work.

Finally, for RO2 we analyzed websites for the inclusion of visual communication including photos, videos, and illustrations. All landing pages had at least one photo, but only four

had a video and an illustration. Visual communication can play a key role in both the "E" and "T" of the MERIT framework (Creary, 2020). Using visuals allows current and prospective employees to "see" themselves in the company and allows stakeholders to understand how the company values DEI.

For the qualitative portion of the study, we identified two emergent themes and one subtheme. The first theme to emerge was the *corporate theme*. Using executive and non-executive voices, just under half of the companies communicated that DEI work is important for building up the company and important to corporate success. These quotes can indicate how these companies are using the MERIT framework to value DEI work. By elevating executive and non-executive employee voices, these companies are indicating that leaders and non-managerial employees are serving and supporting DEI efforts. This aligns with the "I" in the MERIT framework (Creary, 2020) and demonstrates that these companies are working to reach their goals of social justice by creating welfare for a broad range of groups, thus contributing to their CSR (Bowen, 1943).

Within this theme emerged the *work to be done* subtheme. In this subtheme, employees discussed how while things are not perfect, they are putting in the work to ensure a diverse workplace with equitable opportunities for all employees. In several instances, these employees discussed DEI goals and the actionable work needed to be done to reach this goal – a key part of the "M" in the MERIT framework (Creary, 2020).

The final theme to emerge from the qualitative portion of the study was the *personal and professional development* theme. In this theme we see employees discuss DEI work as core to developing the personal and professional identity and relationship of employees. This is key for a company as it works toward CSR (Bowen, 1943). By prioritizing the personal and professional growth of diverse and minoritized populations, companies can develop a more inclusive environment for current employees and become a destination for diverse talent (Montenegro, 2020; Zepponi, 2022).

As an exploratory study, we offer several recommendations for future research. One, future research should analyze how current and potential employees seek out information regarding a company's DEI work. While starting from the corporate homepage is one option, there are alternative methods to finding this information. Additionally, it could be valuable to understand what external resources current and potential employees use when seeking out DEI information regarding a company, such as its Human Rights Campaign Equality Index Score. Additionally, qualitative interviews with employees of these food and agricultural companies could offer insight into how the content on these corporate DEI websites are manifested in the work environment.

Finally, future research should also analyze corporate DEI work among food and agricultural companies over time. As new environmental, climate, and supply chain issues arise, diverse perspectives will be needed to address these challenges. How these agricultural and food companies address these challenges, and the manner in which a diverse workforce can help overcome these challenges, will be key to advancements in the agricultural and food industries.

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