Financing Food Justice

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INTERFAITH CENTER ON CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

Food Companies — Let Consumers Know!

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Will Work for Native Food Systems
First Nations Development Institute, which will observe its 35th anniversary next year, was founded on the goal of helping struggling Native American tribes and communities get back on their feet economically while setting the stage for future prosperity. This would happen by supporting them in regaining control of their assets, building new assets, and launching or expanding projects that have economic development potential, often from the grassroots, ground-up level.

First Nations' Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative is at the intersection of where improving Native health and nutrition meets with Native community and economic development. The work would address the critical problem of diet-related health and health and nutrition issues in many Native American communities, while also holding out the promise of creating new jobs and businesses for those communities. Further, this work could encourage the idea of sustainability, stewardship and increased responsibility in food harvesting, production and handling methods -- attributes that echo traditional Native ways -- while also offering tribes a platform for revitalizing their cultures, traditional teachings, ceremonies and practices. It was a win-win idea then, and it still is. We’re now working with American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian communities on food-systems projects.

Accessing healthy food is a challenge for many Native American children and families, and they suffer grossly exaggerated rates of diet-related diseases because of it, such as diabetes, obesity and heart disease. Without access to healthy food, a nutritious diet and good health are out of reach. To increase access to healthy food, we support tribes and Native communities as they build sustainable food systems that improve health, strengthen food security and increase the control over Native agriculture and food systems. First Nations provides this assistance in the form of financial and technical support, including training materials, to projects that address agriculture and food sectors in Native communities.

We work to provide program models that can build healthy communities for the survival of Native nations, and mechanisms to create an enabling environment to develop, grow and expand agriculture-related entrepreneurship and economic development activities. It's that recognition that food systems intersect with other important Native assets – including sovereignty, health and well-being, culture and economic development.

We have made a good start in Native food systems work, but we were only able to fund about 7% of the applications received for Native food-related projects over the past four years (2011-2014). Out of 614 grant requests totaling $24 million, we were only able to fund $1.7 million in projects. Clearly, we still have a long way to go.

By Raymond Foxworth (Navajo)
Deputy Director and Senior Program Officer
First Nations Development Institute
In this world of plenty, 805 million people—one in nine worldwide—live with chronic hunger and regularly do not have enough food to live an active life. More than 70 percent of food insecure people live in rural areas of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Near East. This number rises when including people who face seasonal food shortages or who do not eat a varied diet that includes protein, vitamins and minerals. The numbers grow increasingly alarming when considering the impact on women and children:

- 60 percent of the world’s hungry are women.
- An estimated 26 percent of the world’s children are stunted due to malnutrition.
- Almost 5 million children under the age of 5 die of malnutrition-related causes every year.

Faith communities around the world believe that access to food is a very basic human right, and every human being has a fundamental right to be free from hunger and to have access to adequate food.

On October 16, the global community declares its commitment to create a world free from hunger and malnutrition on World Food Day. Since 1982, the day has honored the founding of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in 1945. This year’s theme, “Family Farming: Feeding the World, Caring for the Earth,” recognizes the 98 percent of the world’s farms that are family farms, managed and operated by a family and relying primarily on family labor. While family farms produce fruits, vegetables, grains, livestock and even fisheries, many of the world’s hungry are family farmers because they lack access to good seeds, adequate crop storage, transportation and financing.

Both in developing and developed countries, family farming is the predominant form of agriculture in the food production sector and impacts efforts at rural development, improving livelihoods and protecting the environment. Selecting this focus for World Food Day 2014 announces that the international community recognizes family farmers’ important contribution to world food security.

Having grown up on a family farm, I appreciate farming’s impact on our food supply and understand the environmental hazards if not done thoughtfully. In my work in the public health sector, I’ve seen the impact of nutrition on a person’s physical, mental and emotional well-being. Everyone, especially the poor, can become healthier and better reach their full potential with access to nutritious foods and beverages. Reducing nutritional disparities helps ensure health equity. As investors, we need to engage companies on issues such as nutritional content of their products, sustainable food production and responsibly marketing their products to ensure everyone’s access to healthy food.

Donna Meyer
Director of Shareholder Advocacy
Mercy Investment Services
As investors, ICCR members want to see companies in which they hold stock grow. As long-term, socially responsible, and faith-consistent investors, however, we also want to see this growth happen sustainably. And in a world in which overweight and obesity are the fifth leading risk factor for death, maintaining and/or aggressively marketing a portfolio of unhealthy food and beverage products is not a sustainable business model. Particularly in mature markets, the food industry has begun to respond to the risks and opportunities presented by growing consumer awareness of the importance of nutrition for health. Food, restaurant, and retail companies are increasing the numbers of offerings in their portfolios that are healthy or at least better-for-you to keep their brands relevant in this changing environment. But some of these same companies continue to identify consumers of color in industrialized countries and the vast populations of newer consumers in rapidly-developing economies overseas as major “growth markets” for their traditional and, perhaps, less healthy products. Domestically, brands compete hard for shelf space in dollar stores, which African American and Latino consumers patronize more frequently than the general population. With communities of color at elevated risk for diet-related diseases and one in five U.S. children experiencing food insecurity, the nutritional quality of foods sold at the deepest discounts matters. At the same time, companies are investing heavily in expanding their operations in emerging markets such as India and China, with some businesses committing entire divisions to the sole goal of achieving growth in these economies. In these countries, too, where widespread micronutrient deficiencies persist even as obesity-linked diseases such as type II diabetes spread at explosive rates, companies have a responsibility to consider the public health consequences of the rapid expansion of their own business. We at ICCR are asking companies to make consideration of local nutrition needs an integral part of their growth strategy. This means not just acting through philanthropic channels to address hunger and encourage physical activity, but gaining an understanding of the nutrition and public health needs of consumers and using this knowledge to drive innovation, prompt reformulation of existing products, and shape parameters for responsible marketing practices. Companies need to adopt this approach globally, wherever they do business – or risk exacerbating the already-stark health disparities that exist between communities.

Sr. Gwen Farry
Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Obesity in youth remains a grave public health threat, in the U.S. and globally. According to a recent analysis by the Centers for Disease Control, teenagers’ obesity rates increased in the last decade, and the rates for children remain more than double (and for adolescents, quadruple) what they were in 1980. We know from studies that children are particularly susceptible to food marketing and that it has the power to shape youths’ diets. ICCR members are asking food manufacturers, retailers and media, particularly social media companies with young audiences, to implement prudent policies that will restrict messaging and marketing that promotes junk food.

An increasing amount of marketing takes place online, so this is an important topic in ICCR’s engagements. In its last analysis of food industry spending on advertising to children in 2012, the FTC found that while companies modestly decreased their spending on TV ads directed at youth, they spent a dramatic 50% more on digital advertising. But this increased spending figure doesn’t nearly capture the importance of these new forms of promotion, because companies are not only purchasing ad space on websites but turning users of social media into brand ambassadors, multiplying consumer exposures when an online promotion goes viral on Facebook or Twitter.

Moreover, companies are increasingly using extensive data collected from consumers’ online activities to target consumers with more personalized and immediate marketing than ever before. Of great concern is the on-line tracking of youth by social media companies who sell the data to food marketers so they can continuously refine their strategies against these young audiences. Kids under 13 have some protections under the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act, but adolescents’ online data is treated no differently than that of adults.

The business model of social media companies relies on offering marketers access to an unparalleled amount of personal data. The online surveillance of children and teens is disturbing to both parents and public health advocates, who worry about how the commercial use of this information will impact kids’ health and well-being. It is an issue of children’s rights, and it is also a source of reputational, regulatory, and financial risk for companies.

As shareholders, we are asking companies to uphold children’s right to privacy – enshrined in Article 16 of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. We are also asking for more responsible food marketing to youth, joining the Danish Institute/UNICEF, the Federal Trade Commission, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the World Health Organization, First Lady Michelle Obama, and others dedicated to safeguarding the rights and health of children.

Sr. Judy Byron
Coordinator
Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment
Who picked the food you eat? Too often in the conversation about food justice, we focus on the product rather than the worker. We clean up supply chains and make good choices when we go to the grocery store. But as a rabbi, I know that is not my tomato or banana that is created in the image of God: it is the person who picked that product. Fighting for food justice means ensuring the human rights and wages of agricultural workers, and doing so in a way that places the needs, dignity, and expertise of the workers at the head of the table.

My organization, T’ruah: the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights is privileged to be the Jewish ally of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ (CIW), based near Fort Myers, FL. Many of us are familiar with their Campaign for Fair Food, in which major corporations are persuaded to pay one penny more per pound for Florida tomatoes (which goes directly to farmworkers) and only buy from growers who have committed to a binding human rights code of conduct in the fields. To date, 12 corporations—including Walmart, McDonald’s, and Whole Foods—have signed on. But many of us are not aware of the dramatic changes that have been happening for Florida farmworkers since late 2010, when the Fair Food Program began to be implemented in more than 90% of Florida’s tomato fields. Today, for Florida tomato workers, a new world of k’vod habriot, human dignity, is being built, as human rights are written into the very fabric of an industry once known for punishing conditions: wage theft, violence, sexual harassment. Suddenly, an industry once called “ground zero” for human trafficking in America has had no slavery cases in three years—even with increased oversight—making it the most successful slavery prevention program in the country. More than $15 million—a lot of pennies per pound!—have been given to workers, raising wages and making tangible changes in people’s lives. The FFP was in April heralded on the front page of the New York Times as “the best workplace-monitoring program... in the U.S.” It is an unparalleled, worker-led system of accountability, transparency, and enforcement. This is food justice in action.

Why is it so critical for all of us, as consumers, as people of faith, to join a story already producing profound change? Because the historic successes flourishing in tomato fields won’t be strengthened and expanded to workers in other crops and states unless more corporations commit to these changes. Their neglect is not benign. It means that there continues to be a market for produce harvested in fields where the basic human dignity of workers—the recognition of their creation in the image of God—is not respected. Joining the Fair Food Program is not just about good business for corporations like Wendy’s, Publix, Ahold, and Kroger’s. It is a moral imperative. And as investors and activists, it is our obligation to hold corporations to that imperative.

Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster
Director of Programs
T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Where do you go to buy most of your food? A supermarket? A dollar store? A fast food joint? Does it feel clean and inviting? Is the food fresh? Are you treated with respect? Your answers to these questions provide a snapshot of where you are in the retail food system. The truth of the matter is that we have a segregated food system. Our access to healthy food often depends on where we live, how much money we can spend and how the corporate food industry perceives us.

At Praxis, we call this the Jim Crow food system. Jim Crow is a pejorative term to describe a system of legal and de facto segregation in the United States that created legacies of privilege and wealth for whites by centuries of slavery and exploitation of African descendants, indigenous nations and immigrants deemed to be non white. Like its original namesake, Jim Crow Food exploits lower income, mostly communities of color and privileges higher income, predominantly white communities. In fact, it is built on the original legacy of Jim Crow – inequities in wealth, housing, education – to normalize inequity in food access and make it seem as if these gaps are a result of consumer choice.

How does the Jim Crow Food system work? Our food system is segregated throughout every aspect of its operation – from production, to its marketing, to availability and beyond. Who owns the land, who works the land, who stocks the shelves, who gets to see what products where, are all contextualized by race, income and class. Our food retail system operates along three tiers of access – the concierge level where great food is available at high prices for those willing and able to make the investment; the big middle where most of our markets operate across a continuum of quality from better to bad; and the discount level where consumers have limited food offerings at dollar stores or other liquidators that resell items that markets cannot sell for a variety of reasons, including expired goods and other items that often would have been donated to food banks. The differences in quality and access are vast – even within the same food chains – and it simply isn’t right.

Food is a human right. We all need healthy food to thrive. This Food Day, let’s hold the food industry accountable to fair food standards so that everyone has what they need to eat well, no matter where they live or how much money they have.

AyeNay Abye
Field Director
The Praxis Project
Producing today’s food results in astonishing environmental impacts on our natural resources: 70% of water is consumed by the global agriculture sector; soil is eroding at an increased speed due to industrial farming practices; and this erosion and deterioration of soils on industrial farms releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere exacerbating climate change. Moreover, up to 2 billion tons of food are wasted every year - equivalent to 50% of all food produced - according to a report published by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IME). In order to feed our planet’s growing population, expected to be 9 billion by 2050, ICCR calls on food, meat and commodities producers to embrace a strategy to reduce environmental impacts and conserve natural resources.

Looking at the livestock industry alone, we can see how a massive amount of water, land, food and energy is required to raise the animals we consume. Nearly half of all the water used in the U.S. goes to raising billions of food animals (watering the crops they eat, drinking water and cleaning factory farms and slaughterhouses). 30 percent of the Earth’s land mass is used to raise animals, and 260 million acres of U.S. forest have been cleared to create cropland to grow grain to feed these animals. Furthermore, it takes 11 times the fossil fuel to produce one calorie of animal protein as it does to produce one calorie of plant protein; livestock production is responsible for 18% of greenhouse gases.

ICCR members are asking companies to commit to an “agro-ecological” or sustainable production that will preserve the planet’s resources for future generations as well as the loyalty of consumers who are increasingly demanding sustainably produced foods. We call on companies to:

- minimize, monitor, and measure water consumption, wastewater discharges and impacts on groundwater in all business operations and supply chains;
- conduct regular impact assessments of the food security implications of company land and water use along the value chain;
- formalize policies regarding land and water use in relation to marginalized rural communities and the potential impacts to their food security;
- implement animal welfare guidelines that support humane conditions and avoid close confinement and large-scale, geographically-intensive livestock operations; and;
- increase farmers’ preparedness and resilience in the face of more frequent and extreme weather events by assessing risk and vulnerability and developing and sharing strategies for more efficient use of natural resources.

Adopting these practices is critical for successful agro-ecological production systems and ensuring the availability of natural resources to meet our food production needs now and in the future.

Nadira Narine
Interfaith Center on corporate Responsibility
Found in roughly half of all supermarket products, palm oil – created by pulping the fruit of oil palms – has become an important globally-traded agricultural commodity. About 90 percent of all palm oil comes from Southeast Asia, specifically, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia, the latter being the world’s largest producer and exporter of palm oil, according to the Rainforest Action Network. In the last decade, global production of palm oil has more than doubled. The explosive growth in popularity of palm oil has unfortunately given rise to social and environmental justice controversies. The World Bank ranks Indonesia as the 3rd largest emitter of greenhouse gases, due largely to the burning of carbon rich forests and peatlands to grow palm oil.

The clearing of land for palm oil has also wreaked irreparable damage on the habitats of endangered species and is responsible for a massive loss of biodiversity in the region. Beyond the serious environmental impacts of palm oil production, the U.S. Department of Labor cites the palm oil industry as one of the most notorious for slavery and the use of forced and/or trafficked migrant laborers including children. A full 25% of the palm oil produced in the Philippines is estimated to involve forced child labor and in July, 2013 Bloomberg Businessweek ran a story documenting evidence of slave labor conditions on some of the very same palm plantations that supply palm oil to major household brands that use the ingredient in their products.

As concerned investors who recognize the enormous risks associated with palm oil production, Green Century has worked with a network of investors at ICCR and Ceres to press the companies we invest in to verify that the palm oil they purchase is traceable to suppliers independently verified as slavery-free and environmentally sustainable. Since December 2013, investors have secured groundbreaking commitments from major companies to decouple their palm oil supply chains from deforestation and human rights abuses. Several of the top palm oil consuming companies in the world including Kellogg’s, Smuckers, General Mills, Safeway, ConAgra, Cargill, Wilmar, and more have pledged to source 100% of their palm oil from suppliers independently verified as not engaged in degradation of peatlands, high carbon stock or high conservation value areas, or any form of burning. These commitments also hold companies accountable and responsible for implementing the United Nations’ Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, ensuring a trafficking- and slavery-free supply chain. We continue to work with these companies to rapidly implement their commitments, and press more to follow suit. By pledging to decouple palm oil from deforestation and human rights abuses, companies are protecting the environment, local communities, and long-term shareholder value.

Lucia von Reusner
Shareholder Advocate
Green Century Capital Management
As responsible investors who recognize the power of capital markets to influence people’s lives, ICCR members carefully scrutinize the social impact of all the assets in their portfolios. And as fiduciaries, accountable to their respective clients and communities, ICCR members are also responsible for ensuring a healthy return on their investments. We know these two goals are not mutually exclusive. In fact, there is strong evidence that “social investments” that focus on long term, sustainable profitability often outperform traditional portfolios which may lack environmental, social and governance criteria.

ICCR members apply the same degree of scrutiny when evaluating the potential impacts of various markets and asset classes as they look to diversify their portfolios and, in the course of their evaluations, food commodities markets have surfaced as a potential red flag for responsible investors. ICCR members are concerned about reports that over-speculation or excessive hedging in food commodities markets may create global food price bubbles as these price spikes have been linked to growing food insecurity that keeps millions of people from escaping poverty.

In the search for higher returns, the participation of institutional investors in commodity markets has grown markedly in recent years. Many of these investments are geared toward people betting on commodities prices rising over time. No one is arguing that the original purpose of the commodities futures markets isn’t valid and necessary, but we are concerned about the participation of parties that have no use for the product being traded.

Additionally, there is strong evidence that the food bubbles of 2007/2008 and 2010/2011 were caused by the excessive speculation in food commodities markets spurred by both financial deregulation and the growth of biofuels. ICCR members are known for seeing ahead of the curve, particularly when it comes to high risk speculative financial instruments that are wealth-generating vehicles without any underlying social value. As many investors are simply unaware of the potential pitfalls, we are attempting to build awareness in the investment community about the social risks of these markets by providing practical guidance to ensure their investments remain responsible. ICCR members, such as Mercy Investment Services and the Maryknoll Sisters put this awareness into practice by adopting a screen to avoid investments in food commodities.

At bottom, this is about food, and in order to feed the over 9 million people on our planet expected by 2050, we need to do everything within our power to make it accessible and affordable. Excessive financial speculation in food commodities markets is literally gambling with hunger and with people’s lives.

Cathy Rowan
Corporate Responsibility Coordinator
Maryknoll Sisters
We’re in restaurants a lot. The average adult eats out four to five times a week; as a nation, we spend 47 percent of our food budgets dining out. And with more than 13 million people in the industry’s workforce, 1 in 12 Americans has worked in a restaurant. That’s why people think they’re pretty familiar with the restaurant industry. Until, that is, you find out that of the country’s 10 lowest-paying jobs, six of them are restaurant jobs. Servers use food stamps at twice the rate of the rest of the U.S. workforce and are three times as likely to live in poverty. And while it’s important that people can turn to public support programs during challenging times, these programs certainly weren’t designed to be permanent wage subsidies or part of the business strategy for employers.

Compounding the problem of widespread low wages, the restaurant industry is one of the only (and certainly largest) economic sector that uses tips as way to force customers to pay a significant segment of it’s workforce’s wages. The subminimum wage at the federal level has been $2.13 an hour since 1991, and is below the regular minimum wage in 43 states. Instead of getting paid a stable, base wage directly by their employer, servers are forced to curry favor with each new customer, over and over again, in order to stand a chance of seeing any take-home pay. And although employers are legally required to pay the full minimum wage when tips don’t add up, enforcement is weak and disorganized, resulting in widespread wage theft. According to a report from the Economic Policy Institute, the federal government employed only one workplace inspector for every 141,000 workers in 2008. That meant the average employer had a .001 percent chance of being investigated in a given year. The two-tiered wage system is broken.

Fortunately, ROC is committed to fixing it by fighting for living wages for all restaurant workers, but we’ll need everyone’s help.

First, speak up every time you dine out. Restaurant owners need to know that wages and labor practices are important to you as a consumer. You can use our Diners Guide App to find “high road” restaurants in your area, but most importantly, you should encourage all restaurant owners to do the right by their employees.

Second, get to know the folks bringing food to your table. Extend your conversation to include them: How long have they been in the industry? Are they supporting a family? What’s the craziest thing that ever happened to them at work? If you’re a seasoned veteran, or did a stint of waiting tables in college, you should share your story at livingofftips.com.

Finally, support ONE FAIR WAGE. There will be growing attention on initiatives that do more than raise the abysmally low tipped minimum wage, but eliminate it entirely -- and require all employers to directly pay their employees at least one, fair minimum wage.

Maria Myotte
Restaurant Opportunities Center United
Since their introduction, GE food crops have been mired in controversy. First authorized for field testing in the US in 1986 and made commercially available in 1996, GE crops are both derided as “Frankenfoods” and lauded for their hunger-eliminating potential. More than 60 percent of all processed foods available today contain GE ingredients such as soy, corn, or canola; and because in the U.S. there is no mandate that GE food be labeled, most people have been unknowingly eating them for years. Members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility contend that all GE foods should be labeled so that consumers have the opportunity to make more informed food choices.

There are significant concerns regarding increased allergens in GE foods and even scientific disagreement over whether genetically engineered crops actually outperform their conventionally grown rivals. For this reason, ICCR members apply the precautionary principle to the use of GE foods; that is, in the absence of scientific consensus, the burden of proving their safety falls to companies. As shareholders in agriculture, food and food service companies, we believe that the failure to adequately assess the risks of GE ingredients may expose them to liabilities and the public to health risks.

In recent years, several weeds have built up resistance to the herbicides used on GE crops driving the use of more, and multiple, industrialized herbicides to kill them. Who is looking long-term, for the protection of the consumer and the food system and who will bear the risk? These issues are critical and the regulatory system is not adequately addressing them.

Members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility have been engaging food producers and retailers as shareholders on GE foods for over a decade. Progress has been slow but consistent: After engaging with ICCR members, Starbucks committed to using only non-rBGH dairy products in its stores; Hain Celestial developed a brochure clarifying its policies regarding GE foods; Heinz pledged to avoid GE ingredients in its products; Dow, DuPont and Monsanto established “Principles for Biotechnology” and do not engineer food crops for drugs or industrial chemicals.

Before the technology advances any further and GE foods become too embedded in our food system we need long-term studies to better understand how they interact with the planet’s ecosystem, including their impact on animal and human health. Failure to do our due diligence on this could have disastrous consequences for agricultural sustainability and thus, our world’s food supply.

At minimum, we all have a right to know what we’re eating, GE or not.

Margaret Weber
Basilan Fathers of Toronto
The importance of bees and other pollinators on our food system is substantial. About one out of every three bites we eat comes from plants pollinated by honeybees, and more than 85% of the plant species on earth require pollinators to exist. According to the USDA, “bee-pollinated commodities account for $20 billion in annual U.S. agricultural production and $217 billion worldwide.” However, our food system faces peril as pollinator populations have declined significantly in recent years. A growing body of science has emerged pointing to neonicotinoid pesticides, or “neonics,” the most widely used class of insecticides in the world, as a major contributor to bee losses. To tackle this issue, ICCR members led by Trillium Asset Management and the Sustainability Group of Loring, Wolcott & Coolidge, approached nineteen companies exposed to potential systemic risks from declining pollinator populations. We found that few companies were taking concrete action to address these risks. Home Depot and Whole Foods Market proved to be the exception. Subsequent to constructive dialogues with investors and NGOs, both companies announced policies and practices to protect bees and other pollinators.

In June, Home Depot announced that before year end, it will require suppliers to label all plants treated with neonics, and will help suppliers eliminate their use. In addition, the Company now offers customers a list of neonic-free alternatives for home use. We believe this will set a precedent for other retailers. Whole Foods Market launched standards ranking produce and flowers based on the suppliers’ efforts to protect air, soil, water, and human health. With this move, Whole Foods is the first buyer to reward farmers that adopt bee-friendly farming practices and limit the use of bee-harming pesticides. These standards give consumers choices and are an important step toward encouraging more sustainable agricultural practices. These actions are a great start, but more needs to be done. We suggest the following actions to support the long-term vitality of our food system:

- Ask companies to take action to promote pollinator health and incentivize suppliers to utilize bee-friendly alternatives;
- Tell the EPA to support stronger policies to protect pollinators.

**Larisa Ruoff**  
Loring Wolcott & Coolidge

**Susan Baker**  
Trillium Asset Management

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