Mari Haughey

Procurement Adventurer

Intro

I was fortunate to work with Mari on the sourcing of **peanuts and glass** during her time as **Supply Chain & Sustainability Director for Pip & Nut.**

This culminated in a fascinating sourcing trip to Argentina. Seeing her in action with the suppliers and farmers (and her off road driving skills!) it was clear that she is a natural Procurement Adventurer.

Here’s her story...

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What was the catalyst for your career in Procurement?

My career started in supply chain for start-up to scale-up businesses. I was studying nutrition part-time and had a passion for food and ‘better-for-you-products’. A pivotal moment came when I joined **BEAR (Urban Fresh Foods).**





Before I knew it, I was doing lots of procurement but without calling it that. We were a small team and covered everything from procurement to outbound logistics. BEAR then lead on to my role as **Supply Chain & Sustainability Director for Pip & Nut.**

Over the past 12 years I gained a deep-rooted understanding of materials, packaging and sustainability.

You've talked about Supply Chain & Procurement - how do they link?

Whilst Procurement and Supply Chain have two distinct roles, they need to be completely in sync. Upstream Procurement need to find, vendor assure and onboard excellent suppliers and create robust contracts with them. They can then hand the batten over to the inbound supply chain team to draw off the contracts.

If the two teams aren't speaking the same language, it'll create problems and impact supply. It's all about linking the whole supply chain together.

What's the most interesting Procurement Adventurer you've had?

The sourcing trip for Pip & Nut to California stands out. It was our first origin trip for almonds and really highlighted the power of getting out and seeing things first hand. We had an open mindset for what we were looking for visiting larger suppliers as well as small and super innovative farms.



Many almond orchards and growers in California are multigenerational and we loved hearing their stories. They were passionate about protecting the land and treating it with respect, making sure they could pass it on to the next generation. We saw lots of different sustainable practices ranging from drip irrigation and solar power to regenerative practices like sheep grazing in the orchards – that was a highlight to see!



"My team was brilliant at navigating through Covid"

Pip & Nut is a cool brand - how was it?

It was great! The team at Pip & Nut are so passionate about the brand, the products and are brilliant at what they do. Being in that environment and seeing the business succeed was really rewarding.

I had the opportunity to work closely with the Founder, Pip, and the leadership team and gained so much knowledge on strategy and the different business functions outside of supply chain and procurement. My team were brilliant at navigating through the challenges of Brexit, Covid and inflation and it was a joy seeing them develop and grow. Something I really valued was the opportunity to expand your role – I took the lead on sustainability after certifying as a B-Corp.

I have just relocated to Houston with my husband (and a suitcase full of P&N products!) which meant saying goodbye to Pip & Nut – one door closing but another opening as I look for another job here.



Procurement is both art and science - comment

Procurement is a great example of art and science, and one of the reasons I love it! The science piece is tasks like researching the market, benchmarking suppliers and analysis of cost structures. When it comes to working with suppliers it’s an art how to connect, ask slightly awkward questions and dig in a positive way to get insightful answers.

There’s a bit of art to decision making too. Something might come out slightly better with the scientific lens, but your gut instinct tells you different.

"How do we attract great people to Procurement ...full stop?!"

How do we attract GenZ to Procurement?

Let’s cast the question wider to this – “How do we attract great people to procurement...full stop?!”

When I started my career, I wasn’t aware of procurement as an option. Supply Chain wasn’t even widely communicated. There are so many reasons why it’s a great career route, we just need to make it more approachable and bring it to life. After sourcing trips at Pip & Nut, the wider team found it fascinating learning more about the raw materials, the processing of the nuts, our suppliers, that’s a great role for a procurement team to be able to play.

One aspect which could appeal to GenZ is the link between sourcing and sustainability as they are more eco conscious. Procurement has a key role to play in implementing sustainability strategy through their vendor assurance, materials sourcing and building relationships at origin.

How does B-Corp and Procurement dovetail?

BCorp and Procurement are incredibly inter-linked as I mentioned above. Certifying as a B-Corp for the first time involves a lot of work to just understand how you're already operating, and the procurement team has so much knowledge on your suppliers, specs and contracts.

They'll also have valuable insights on how to improve and are in a brilliant position to execute those plans, driving positive impact. An example of this might be working with packaging suppliers to optimise a pack design in order to reduce weight.

"The greatest challenge is how to balance cost and sustainability "

What are the challenges Procurement need to face into?

The greatest challenge is how to balance cost and sustainability. Sourcing materials with best-in-class credentials can come at a premium and when this is the case, there needs to be an open conversation about how to manage changes and what the timeline looks like – having those conversations will lead to strong long-term relationships with your supply partners.

Added cost isn’t always a given though - many farmers are already using sustainable practices because it makes good business sense. Growers in California are very water conscious because of cost and availability and use efficient drip irrigation as a result.



What makes a great Procurement Director?

Several things in my mind:

Having an eye on macro trends and seeing how they might impact Procurement, identifying potential risks or weaknesses in the Procurement process.

Someone who elevates Procurement within the business & leadership meetings, making sure challenges being faced and the wins delivered are really being heard.

Someone who strikes the right balance between analysis and action – some work needs a lot of detail but other times you need to act quick.

What are the soft skills you look for when interviewing?

Supply chain and procurement can involve a lot of firefighting and problem solving so for me I always look for team players and people with the drive to find solutions.

Being a great communicator sounds like a generic one but in our work, it’s essential. You need to be able to cover everything from having a chat with a production lead in a factory to delivering a tough message on performance with a supplier’s management.

What's your favourite procurement technique?

Tendering. It sounds obvious and is something larger businesses will do as standard practice but for SMEs and smaller teams (often juggling a lot), it’s tempting to keep with the same supplier and feel like maybe you don’t have the scale to negotiate.

Going through a formal tender process helps create real options and therefore negotiating power. Pair that with a bottom-up cost model and you should be in a good position to land the right strategic outcome.

Favorite brands stateside

Ritual – great protein made with regeneratively grown peas, B-Corp

LMNT – the electrolytes taste amazing and are essential in the Texan heat

Siete Foods – I love the Mexican products from this family founded brand based in Texas, an amazing business success story too

Siggis – we get through a lot of this delicious skyr – the perfect example of a very simple product done well



"Next on the list is Nashville for the music!"

You've recently moved to the US - where do you want to explore?

The US has some amazing national parks and having just got back from Zion National Park in Utah, I'm excited to explore more. Montana and Wyoming are next on the list, as is New England (ideally in autumn) and Nashville for the music!

Observations about the US?

We're loving it so far. Couple of observations from a sustainability perspective. I've noticed that the US are further behind than Europe on some things like recycling norms, single use plastic and plastic bags in supermarkets. On the other hand, I've come across some really inspiring companies who are ahead of the curve on how we grow our food e.g. Pasturebird.

What advice would you give your younger self?

Ask for help! It’s tempting to try to figure everything out yourself but asking for help from someone who’s done it before shows confidence (not weakness) and will often result in a better (and faster) outcome.

Rapid fire

Peanut butter – smooth or crunchy >> **crunchy**

Pickleball or Padel >> **pickleball**

New York or California >> **California**

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