

BerryWorld - Employee wellbeing during Covid



Who are BerryWorld?

BerryWorld Ltd are experts in international berry breeding and marketing, bringing many soft fruit varieties to market. They supply to various leading retailers and wholesalers, with over 25 years' experience developing the market, working with a dedicated global grower base and a presence in multiple retail sectors around the world. They have several partner packing sites based around the UK and 140 employees working in their London head office.

Summary

BerryWorld's *YouMatter@BerryWorld* programme was headed up by the HR department and aimed to promote inclusion, engagement and good welfare for the employees that work at BerryWorld.

What prompted the action?

When COVID-19 hit, BerryWorld realised that there would be unprecedented challenges for them to overcome as a business and that worker welfare was a large part of that. Research has shown that anxiety and depression increased sharply in the pandemic[#] and companies struggled to engage their remote working colleagues. BerryWorld were proactive in thinking early on about ensuring that everyone in the head office felt supported, engaged and fairly treated, whilst working from home.



BerryWorld was proactive to take preventative measures and initiate action towards wellness and a positive culture.

Taking action

The programme was headed up by the HR department, to create a positive culture which prioritised wellbeing and in turn enabled them to support growers and their employees in the supply chain to take positive action to tackle the significant challenges that they faced in the period. *YouMatter@BerryWorld* brought all their people activities and welfare checks under one commitment which aligned to the wider company values and behaviours, namely 'Relationships' and 'I find a way' - a people-oriented approach to finding solutions. A key aspect of the programme was that employees on furlough were included, so they still felt supported and part of the team.

The activities within the programme were varied and numerous:

- **Exercise.** Promoting mental wellbeing through movement, which included sharing the benefits of exercise, a 'winter-workout challenge', a

'Berry-thon' challenge and online classes.

- **Online regular catch ups.** Virtual book club and opportunities to meet up for tea and a chat weekly, where people were encouraged not to talk about work but about life, family and new ways of living.
- **Welfare webinars** including qualified mental health members offering regular check-ins with employees, a program of events around wellness topics, regular tips about working from home and a COVID-19 back to work brochure, encouraging people to commit to a weekly welfare plan.
- **Team building events** online including quizzes, regular sharing of employee good news, virtual 'happy hour' in teams, raffles, competitions.
- **Employee of the month** and years of service milestones celebrated.
- Some of the activities were extended to growers including Mental Health Awareness and BBQ team events.



This case study has been developed with the support of Co-op as part of Co-op's 2021 'Treating People Fairly Awards', at which Berry World was shortlisted. The awards celebrate excellence in human rights practice, encourage suppliers to learn from each other and inspire new ways of mitigating future threats to worker welfare. Supplier entries were assessed by an independent, expert panel and awards were presented at a Co-op supplier event. BerryWorld has been working with Co-op for approximately 21 years. Click [here](#) and [here](#) to learn more about human rights at Co-op.

Analysis of data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) has tracked changes in levels of psychological distress during the pandemic. It suggests the proportion of adults aged 18 and over reporting a clinically significant level of psychological distress increased from 20.8% in 2019 to 29.5% in April 2020, then falling back to 21.3% by September 2020. There was a subsequent increase to 27.1% in January 2021, followed by a further decrease to 24.5% in late March 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-surveillance-report/2-important-findings-so-far>

Impact

The benefits of the programme were tracked by attendance, engagement, feedback and participation. Feedback was regularly checked with an engagement system called 'Hibob', and used to help them plan future events, as well as leaders encouraging their teams to give feedback about each activity, submitted to the HR team monthly. They achieved an impressive attendance level of 92% across all the events.

They found that regularly gathering feedback and turning employee feedback into actions (#yousaidwedid), helped their people to feel included and really made them feel part of the culture. It was a very inclusive opportunity to make staff feel they were all treated fairly (including employees on furlough).

Lessons learnt and taking it forward

- Not waiting until there is an employee wellbeing crisis but being proactive to support people before problems arise. As a result BerryWorld HR have made this an integral part of their 2022 People Calendar and continue to adapt to the changing post COVID-19 situation - recently launching WINSDAY - a new initiative to encourage face to face interaction and return to the office.
- Giving a variety of activities and means to engage, ensured that everyone felt included. They recognised that not everyone would want to engage with the activities and therefore they asked people to give feedback on what their hobbies were, so that those could be encouraged and activities could be developed in line with those. This is now a fully integrated function within the 'Hibob' people management system, allowing HR to analyse the data submitted by staff and adapt their People Calendar accordingly.
- BerryWorld has seen the benefits of sharing their engagement programmes and good news stories further down the chain to employees at grower sites. Previously BerryWorld has been sharing mental health awareness support and now they are exploring more ideas through direct worker feedback via BerryWorld's new Speak Up worker engagement programme. It was also beneficial to demonstrate grower efforts as well, to show solidarity across businesses within the berry industry.

"For the first time in my career, we had to make some drastic decisions about our people, who worked, who didn't and why. The best tool we had was to listen to our people, stay in touch and ensure they felt included, no matter what their day to day was like."

- Kim Rezk, HRD BerryWorld



"During the time I was on furlough, I felt very supported by BerryWorld and my managers. The HR team put a lot of effort into keeping us together during that difficult time."

Maria Soltero Group Development Consultant



What makes this a leadership approach?*

Proactivity

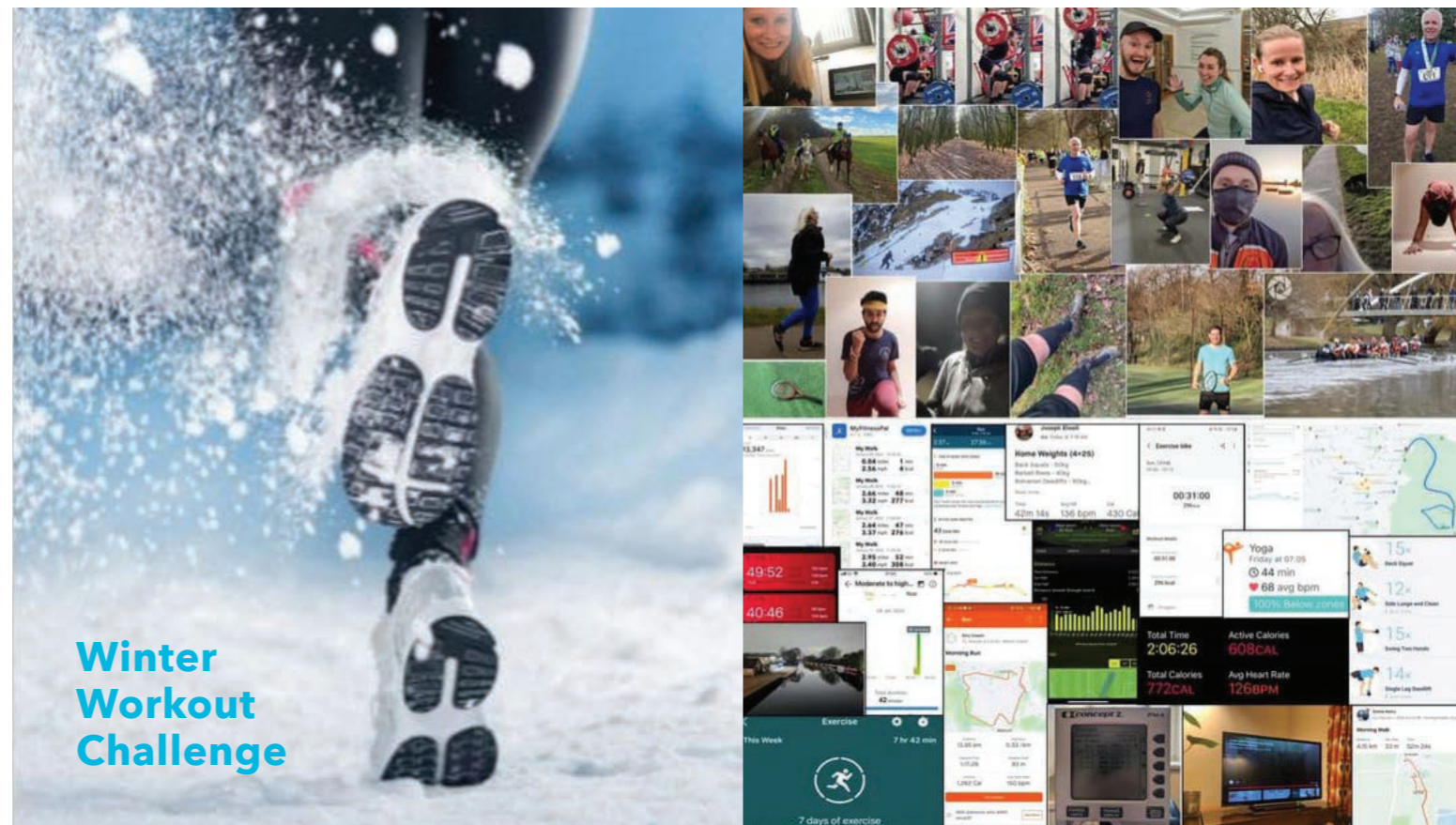
BerryWorld was proactive to take preventative measures and initiate action towards wellness and a positive culture, rather than waiting for issues to occur.

Ownership

Many new ideas and approaches were trialled and refined through regular feedback, taking ownership of the initiation and ongoing development of the programme, to ensure it was hitting the mark of benefiting employees.

Partnership

This programme promoted partnership across the business to increase people's sense of connectedness. The business also partnered with external organisations to provide flu jabs and wellness checks. Partnerships included those with Unum Lifestyle Employee Assistance Programme and Medicash Health Plans, to provide employees with additional support as and when they require it.



Winter Workout Challenge

* Key behaviours that Co-op champion are proactivity, ownership and partnership. Click [here](#) to learn more about Co-op's supplier engagement programme. Co-op's 'Supplier's Guide to Ethical Trade' sets out the standards suppliers are expected to meet.