



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

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Akash Arasu is co-vice president at the science and technology think-tank reach based in Zürich. Currently in his final semester in his Masters in Economics at the University of St. Gallen, he is passionate about issues relating to economic development, trade, and the questions posed by an ever interconnected world.

Corporate Social Responsibility.

This year's Academia Engelberg gave high importance to actors from industry in the private sector. While generally a good idea – given the gravity of impact that business has on the world – unfortunately with the exception of Bühler, the industry presentations were less rigorous and credible than other presentations. The lack of trust displayed to the consumer's intellect coupled with the missed opportunity to address genuine stakeholder concerns, resulted in a lot of buzz, fluff, and fuzzy stuff.

What would potentially be more fruitful is to acknowledge one's role in the contribution to resource use and then describe the measures and plans in place to try and curtail the negative effects.

Granted, as consumers we must take responsibility for the role we play in resource use and waste. It is for our sake of convenience, and need for convenience that we enjoy individual packaged pieces of chocolate, insulated cups of chai latte, and good looking vegetables that correspond in colour and size to the ones seen in cartoons. It seems comically absurd that we must embark on [campaigns](#) for the "rights" of ugly fruits and vegetables to be eaten. These preferences which we demand from industry, has resulted in deteriorative business models and unsustainable resource consumption.

Keeping such logic consistent, why does it seem so hard for "Big Agro" to be honest with its stakeholder base. Instead we are subject to [pseudo-sustainable](#) jargon that is questionable at best. There is an inherent fear of public opinion that business succumbs to. Rightfully so. However fear is often a bad advisor and this fear is only realised when the public feels [deceived](#) by those it supports by consuming products. The reaction is generally media backlash and [boycotting](#) of products. All this and



more could be avoided by pre-emptively being transparent on business' interests, initiatives, and drivers.

The first step, often the hardest, is partaking in public forum – which I personally am grateful towards industry representatives for doing. As a consumer I appreciate the opportunity to be able to interact with the faces of large corporations. The next step is creating a more bilateral discussion, most importantly with candor.

We are not unaware of the negative effects of agrochemicals, nor are we ignorant of the obvious benefits they provide. We know that business are confronted with ethical dilemmas when ensuring global supply chains - we are also aware that these supply chains are in place because we need them, demand them.

We must be able to speak openly about these issues without window dressing them in a cloak of CSR. If it is dialogue we are interested in, it is dialogue we should be having. Not an advertising campaign.