

# CT Green Business Awards - Green Manufacturing/Consumer Products - R.C. BIGELOW INC.

MICHAEL C. BINGHAM

201 Black Rock Tpke.

Fairfield 06825

888-244-3569

*bigelowtea.com*

**President:** Cindi Bigelow

**No. employees:** 330

In part due to its well-tuned marketing campaign featuring sports celebs Joe Torre, Phil Simms and Terry Francona, Bigelow Tea has ignited an explosion in the popularity of heart-healthy green tea.

But that's far from the only thing "green" about the Fairfield company that traces its root to 1946, when Ruth Campbell Bigelow's home-kitchen science experiment yielded a savory spiced tea that the world would come to know as Constant Comment. Thus was launched a brand.

Today Bigelow is a third-generation family business run by Ruth Bigelow's savvy granddaughter Cindi Bigelow. She, her parents (who are still involved in the company, though not day-to-day) and management team are committed to active environmental stewardship as part of the corporate citizenship plank of Bigelow's mission statement ("We remain committed to protecting the environment by continually striving to improve the environmental responsiveness of our packaging"). They call it "Sustainabili-Tea." (Get it?)

"We all have a responsibility to make a difference," Cindi Bigelow says. "And if you can, you should." In addition to producing great products, "From Green Tea to Green Power" is Bigelow's mission.

Bigelow's corporate headquarters and manufacturing facility on Black Rock Turnpike has the largest photovoltaic solar panel array in Fairfield and one of the largest in the state, with 880 panels covering 65 percent of the four-level roof. The \$2 million array is capable of producing 207 kw of power, supplying 15 to 20 percent of the facility's annual power demand.

Employee engagement is key to Bigelow's commitment to the environment. "Our employees are if anything even more passionate about being environmentally responsible than I am," says Bigelow. When department heads submit reports to management, there is a mandatory "green" section in each report detailing how that department has contributed to Bigelow's "five buckets of savings": energy savings, material and resource reduction, social responsibility to community and vendor positions, land commitment and employee commitment.

(Those reports are submitted electronically, as Bigelow was an early and aggressive adopter of measures to make its workplace as "paperless" as possible.)

Bigelow employees took the lead in creating a system to compost food from every floor of the 120,000-square-foot Fairfield facility as well as the cafeteria. "In the course of a year this will result in five tons [of waste] not going to a landfill," says Bigelow.

Bigelow owns a 127-acre tea plantation in Charleston S.C. which grows the only tea harvested in America. There no pesticides are used, a custom-designed irrigation system uses rain and pond water alone to hydrate young tea plants, and waste (e.g., stems and fibers) from harvested tea is used as mulch in the tea fields. This not only helps the soil retain water, it also inhibits weed growth, keeps the soil temperatures from becoming too hot or too cold and even protects sloping ground from soil erosion.

The vast bulk of Bigelow tea comes from India, Sri Lanka and China. Bigelow is committed to buying only sustainably harvested

tea through long-term relationships with tea gardens and a commitment to ethical sourcing.

Last April, Bigelow earned an award for "Outstanding Contributions to Good Corporate Citizenship, Community and Sustainability" from the Connecticut Green Building Council.

But what about one of the most distinctive features of Bigelow Tea's packaging — the foil wrappers that keep each tea bag fresh? "Eighty-five percent of our packaging is compostable or biodegradable," Bigelow says. "Fifteen percent is not, and that's the foil.

"But you have to remember, you are drinking the brew of a vegetable — that's why it's so good for you," she adds. "That leaf deteriorates very, very quickly. So for me, that 15 percent I can't compromise on — because I can't compromise on a cup of tea."

— *Michael C. Bingham*