

# Predicting Sustainability Trends for 2020

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A year ago, we made [some guesses](#) about what the biggest sustainability trends would be in the year ahead. We called some of them correctly, but we didn't see all of the year's [biggest eco-news stories](#) coming. Undeterred, we're doing it again. Based on what we've seen this year, here are our predictions for the biggest trends in sustainability for 2020.

## Plastic Break Up

Thanks to an [iconic video](#), 2018 will be remembered as the year Americans broke up with plastic straws. But that news story has a much longer tail than many others, and in 2019, Americans' concern over plastic waste only continued to grow. Despite the difficulty, individuals began looking for ways to make their homes [plastic-free](#) and interest in [compostable plastics](#) grew.

It may be too much to hope that 2020 will be the year Americans break up with plastic. But we expect that growing awareness of the problems with [plastic waste](#) and the risks of [microplastics](#), paired with the challenges of recycling plastic, will lead to more consumer demand for plastic-free options.

## Corporate Eco-consciousness

Regular folks aren't the only ones trying to rid themselves of plastic. Major corporations are starting to embrace [zero waste](#) policies and avoid [single-use plastic](#). It can be hard to tell the difference between greenwashing and corporate transformation, but transparency is a welcome, [growing trend](#). Companies like [Tetra Pak](#) and [World Centric](#) are transforming regulatory-required sustainability reports into meaningful, comprehensible documents online, accessible to investors and consumers.

In 2020 we will see even more companies identifying useful carbon emissions and waste reduction goals. Perhaps companies want to distance themselves from the complete disregard for sustainability shown by the current U.S. administration. Or maybe, [higher environmental standards](#) in the European Union are spurring corporations to improve globally. Whatever the cause, corporations are beginning to realize that, counter to traditional wisdom, sustainability, transparency, and profitability are natural allies.

## Electric Vehicles Switch to Mainstream

The continued growth of [electric vehicles](#) was one of the top sustainability stories [in 2018](#). It looked like self-driving cars would eclipse the EV as a growing trend [in 2019](#). But EVs seem to have [pulled ahead in 2019](#) after all. The market has come a long way from the days when the only option was the hybrid-electric Prius. Late this year, Earth911 identified the seven fully electric vehicle models with the [best environmental performance](#), but the EV market is beginning to expand beyond the

environmentalist audience. For 2020, Tesla has unveiled its [Cybertruck](#) and Ford has promised an [electric Mustang](#) — while more than a dozen EV models from luxury sedans to SUVs are [already available](#) at U.S. car dealerships.

## Meatless Goes Mainstream

If 2019 was the year mainstream America discovered fake meat, 2020 will be the year we start actually eating it. Veggie burgers have been around for decades, but until now only vegetarians cared to eat them. Vegetarians welcome the variety offered by the new burgers, but [Impossible Burger](#) and [Beyond Burgers](#) have caught the attention of meat-eaters with their claims to be more “meatlike” than previous veggie burgers. Such claims have been made before, but this time they seem to be gaining traction. Whether heme really makes the difference, or whether messages about the outsized environmental [impacts of meat](#) are finally sinking in, meatless meats may finally be mainstream in 2020.

## Top Sustainability Trend: Recycling Changes

A few years ago, basic recycling seemed to be the one sustainable action that Americans had mastered. [Curbside recycling](#) service was offered in most communities, with recycling rates and the range of accepted materials consistently growing. But the entire system was built on cheaply exporting our mixed recyclables to China. There, our high contamination rates meant that a lot of it ended up in a landfill in a country with weak environmental laws.

In early 2018, China [stopped accepting](#) recycling imports, and the entire system was thrown into crisis. For months, materials picked up at curbside were stockpiled with no place to go. By 2019, the ban was clearly here to stay. Many communities had abandoned or reduced their recycling programs. Others had raised prices. But there also began to be signs of adjustment in 2019. New markets were found in other countries, and investment in domestic recycling processing capacity began to grow. Spurred by the vacuum in available services, new business models and recycling technologies began to appear.

In 2020, we'll start to see some of that domestic processing capacity come online. Domestic processors, which cannot operate as cheaply as foreign ones, will require curbside programs to deliver cleaner materials. Some of the new specialized recyclers will begin to catch on and expand outside of their original markets. This year won't be enough to establish a new normal for American recycling, but in 2020 we'll begin to see the outlines of what that new normal will look like.

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