

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/improving-carbon-accounting>

Julia Collins, founder and CEO of Planet FWD, explains how her company fits into the growing market for climate management software, which is based on carbon accounting. Traditional carbon accounting is being disrupted by companies that use big data and intelligent software to more accurately and efficiently account for carbon emissions, Collins says, as Planet FWD seeks to do in the food industry.



Transcript

- The description of Planet Forward 00:00:06,330 has like a couple of terms that I think are worth unpacking.. The first is this idea of climate management software.. Like what is that? I think probably the space that most people have familiarity is carbon accounting.. This idea that we can use data and software to measure the greenhouse gas emissions intensity or impact of any thing, any organization, any physical product.. And this was sort of like a sleepy area of accounting for many years until the most recent sort of wave of net zero commitments where massive consumer companies have pledged to reduce their carbon emissions to zero in the next, you know, less than a decade.. And so all of a sudden this very slippery industry of carbon accounting, which by the way was controlled mostly by consultants is being disrupted.. And it's being disrupted by companies like Planet Forward that are leveraging big data and building really sort of intelligent software to be able to do the work of consultants more quickly and efficiently.. So that is sort of what Planet Forward does, you know, the value proposition is carbon accounting that's faster and more efficient than previous methods.. The reason why I'm working in this space is because I'm just incredibly passionate about being able to create a scalable solution to addressing the third, like a 34% of global greenhouse gas emissions that come from food systems.. You know, often when we think about the climate crisis, we focus on transportation and energy and manufacturing is the sectors where we need to work on, you know, decarbonization and, of course, we need to, I would not say that we shouldn't focus on decarbonizing, you know, transportation or energy, but with a third of global greenhouse gas emissions coming from land use and food systems..

What I saw was that there was really a lack of investment in this area.. And although, you know, there were many companies that needed decarbonization solutions in food, there really weren't any tools to serve them.. And so that is why I decided to build Planet Forward and to build it not as a services business, but as a technology business.. - Got it.. 00:02:08,699 So why start with measurement? Why not just go after the solution itself and decrease those carbon emissions? - Yeah, I mean, in order to employ 00:02:17,730 a decarbonization strategy, which is essentially what are the ways that we can remove greenhouse gas emissions from our farming? I'm talking about in the case of food, manufacturing, retailing, distributing, you have to first know where you are, right? You can't improve anything that you can't first measure.. And the problem with the sort of incumbent solutions is that they created these measurements that had no granularity or transparency to them.. So essentially the way traditional carbon accounting works, if you really wanna know, is you take a look at the purchase data for a given organization, how much you spent on pencils and pens and whatever it may be, and you multiply those purchases times an emissions factor.. So like a generic emissions factor for let's say asparagus all over the

world.. But as you can probably, you know, sense that no two asparagus are actually the same.. It depends on where they were grown, how they were grown, what methods were used, did you use pesticides? Did you use renewable energy? And so the incumbent solutions that were relying on broad averages were really not well designed to be able to facilitate decarbonization actually understanding how to change your packaging or change your energy usage or change your farming practices..

And so what we wanted to do at Planet Forward was to bring a lot more rigor and a lot more integrity to the practice of carbon accounting.. And we had to start with measurement first.. You can't improve what you don't first measure, but we needed to improve the way the measurement happened in order to create decarbonization strategies essentially...