



ENVIRONMENT

KLM



“Sustainable flying is inevitable – if you want to continue flying, you have to be sustainable”

INKA PIETER

Director, corporate social responsibility and environmental strategy, KLM

Two years ago, KLM became the first airline in the world to operate a scheduled passenger flight powered partially by biofuel. “We wanted to lead by example,” says the Dutch carrier’s director for corporate social responsibility and environmental strategy, Inka Pieter.

Sustainability is high on KLM’s agenda and the carrier’s efforts to reduce its impact on climate change did not stop after scoring this world first. “Sustainable flying is inevitable – if you want to continue flying, you have to be sustainable,” says Pieter.

The judges were unanimous in their decision. “At KLM, it’s wider than just fuel,” said one judge.

KLM’s first commercial biofuel flight took place in June 2011, when it used a 50:50 blend of kerosene and biofuel derived from used cooking oil to power a Boeing 737-800 from Amsterdam Schiphol to Paris Charles de Gaulle.

It is now in the middle of a six-month programme of operating transatlantic flights between New York JFK and Amsterdam using sustainable biofuel. Every Thursday, a KLM Boeing 777-200 operates services between the cities on an average 20% blend of biofuel derived from used cooking oil and traditional kerosene.

Each flight emits 20% less carbon dioxide than KLM’s regular Amsterdam-New York services, a reduction achieved not only through the use of biofuel but also through other “optimal flight” measures such as reduced taxi times and lower weight of onboard items. “We work together with airports and air traffic control to get the right slots so we don’t wait with the engines running [for longer than necessary],” says Pieter.

Working together is a mantra KLM has been putting into practice throughout its sustainability efforts. In 2009, it teamed up with North Sea Petroleum company Argos and Spring Associates to launch SkyNRG, which provides the biofuel. Working since 2007 with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has led KLM to set an “aspirational target” of sourcing 1% of its fuel needs from alternative sources by 2015, says Pieter.

KLM has come up with an innovative solution to help ease the higher cost of biofuel. A number

of corporate customers, including companies such as Philips, Nike and Heineken, pay a premium to fly their employees on KLM’s biofuel-powered flights. Not only does this help KLM to fund the flights, it enables these corporations “to reduce their own carbon footprints”, says Pieter.

Meanwhile, KLM has worked with Germany’s Mankiewicz to develop a new paint that is 15% lighter than traditional aircraft paint. It has also helped to develop its own engine wash and has been systematically cutting out the weight from its cabins. The carrier recently gave its used crew uniforms a new lease of life by weaving them into the fabric of the carpeting in its business-class cabins.

Pieter says becoming more sustainable is “the only way to survive as an airline”, which is why KLM is “integrating sustainability into our whole business”. Air France-KLM has topped the Dow Jones Sustainability Index in the air transport sector for the last eight years. Winning this award “confirms we’re on the right track”, Pieter says.

KERRY REALS



Pieter: leading by example

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