



Case study: Whitbread and Bidfood working together to drive more responsible sourcing

Intended audience

This case study is intended for anyone interested in learning more about how Bidfood supported their customer, Whitbread, with their 'Force for Good' objectives, when they became their main food and drink supply partner in the UK.

Project context

Prior to working with Bidfood, Whitbread used to manage all their sourcing in-house, liaising directly with Tier 1 suppliers themselves and using a third-party logistics provider for transport and warehousing. By moving to a procurement model where Bidfood are responsible for managing the relationship with Whitbread suppliers, Bidfood also became responsible for ensuring these suppliers adhere to the Whitbread 'Force for Good' objectives, including human rights due diligence, responsible sourcing of commodities i.e. RSPO-certified palm oil (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil), single-use packaging reduction, and animal welfare standards.

One of the most complex aspects was human rights due diligence. While both companies used SEDEX to monitor ethical practices, Bidfood previously required only its own-label suppliers to be SEDEX members. Whitbread, however, required that all non-branded suppliers are SEDEX members, complete a Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) and have an audit if high risk. This centralisation of ethical trade data was critical for maintaining transparency and accountability, enabling both organisations to share information on labour standards, environmental impact, health and safety, and audit results. These measures support risk assessments, as part of the Whitbread and Bidfood human rights due diligence programmes.

By the time the contract entered into force in September 2025, the two organisations had already been working together to strengthen the relationship and align the implementation of Whitbread requirements.

Objectives of the collaboration

SEDEX-specific objectives:

- Ensure all branded and Bidfood own-label manufacturing sites are registered on SEDEX.
- Achieve 100% completion and annual updates of supplier SAQs
- Eliminate any overdue business-critical or critical non-conformances.
- Mandate SMETA audits for high-risk suppliers not audited in the past 24 months and support corrective action.
- Maintain full compliance with these requirements as new suppliers are onboarded, to strengthen transparency and ethical standards.

The transfer of due diligence responsibilities was designed to bring several benefits to Whitbread:

- Streamlining the monitoring of supplier compliance for the Bidfood-managed supply chain
- Improved transparency through Bidfood-managed reporting
- Commercial escalations managed by the Bidfood team instead of the Whitbread Procurement team
- Effective collaboration with the Bidfood Sustainability team aimed at strengthening due diligence and improving responsible sourcing outcomes

Outcomes and results

Bidfood successfully completed the following actions:

- Established communication channels with all branded suppliers in Whitbread's supply chain.
- Completed a desk-based analysis of all high-risk suppliers and engaged those with overdue critical or major non-conformances identified during SMETA audits, ensuring corrective actions were implemented.
- Worked with suppliers to address all business-critical and critical non-conformances before the contract commencement date, improving ethical standards in high-risk areas.
- Achieved 100% completion and annual updates of SAQs, enabling accurate risk assessment.
- Implemented a monthly reporting process to maintain compliance and transparency, helping Bidfood adopt best practices for its own supply chain.
- Increased supplier awareness and alignment through regular communications, fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

Challenges encountered

Any change at scale tends to bring its challenges; these included:

- **Supplier reluctance to join SEDEX:** In the initial engagement phase, a small number of suppliers were either unaware of SEDEX or lacked resources to manage the platform. Others misunderstood its purpose or benefits. To address this, Bidfood adopted a tailored approach—explaining the social, ethical, and commercial advantages of SEDEX and reviewing existing human rights due diligence processes with each supplier. This tailored, supplier-specific approach proved effective because it took into consideration each supplier's knowledge, capacity, and motivation. By explaining what the benefits related to SEDEX are in practical, commercially relevant terms, Bidfood increased suppliers' buy-in and reduced resistance. Finally, by adapting the level of engagement based on each supplier's maturity, Bidfood and Whitbread ensured consistent long-term adherence to Whitbread's human rights due diligence requirements.
- **Branded suppliers' concerns over data visibility:** Some suppliers were hesitant to share sensitive manufacturing data on SEDEX. To overcome this, Whitbread signed NDAs where necessary, and both parties emphasised the importance of transparency for human rights due diligence.

- **Household brands out of scope:** Initially, all branded products were expected to be included in human rights due diligence. However, Bidfood and Whitbread agreed to exclude household brands as these companies already operate under intense public scrutiny. While human rights due diligence remains central, the reputational risk for these brands was deemed high, therefore a strong incentive for them to ensure robust controls are in place, without Bidfood and Whitbread's influence. However, Bidfood and Whitbread plan to review publicly available policies and key resources to gain insights into household brands due diligence practices.

Lessons learnt

Key insights about collaboration

- Monthly meetings and open communication channels enabled Whitbread and Bidfood to collaborate closely, including by sharing progress made or challenges faced by Bidfood. Collaboration based on mutual trust and respect remains a foundation of our relationship.
- Regular reporting during the mobilisation period was essential for assessing short-term challenges and ensuring compliance by the September go-live date.

What worked well and can be replicated

- Creation of a timeline, with suppliers and products categorised into phases helped set priorities, making the process smoother and more focused.
- Joint efforts from Bidfood and Whitbread's commercial teams provided leverage to engage resistant suppliers and improve ethical management practices.

What could be improved in future

- Develop a detailed engagement plan before contacting all suppliers to avoid bespoke conversations with 200+ suppliers.
- Promote quicker, standardised communications to accelerate alignment with SEDEX requirements.

Next steps

- Collaborate further to analyse suppliers' SEDEX management scores and engage those scoring our agreed accepted levels.
- Use these scores to target high-risk suppliers, benchmark performance, and drive continuous improvement.
- Conduct a desktop review of household brands to analyse their human rights due diligence practices.