

# SUSTAINABILITY CORNER

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Congratulations, you are nearly at the end of this training program. The good news is that you have done all of the hard work already.

The bad news is that you can't make the world a better place and make more for your business all by yourself. You need the help of everyone connected to your business. If you are the owner, you need help from everyone else to do it. If you are an employee, then you need the help of the owner and everyone else.

To get this help, you will need to get them on board with the proposition that making your business more environmentally friendly and sustainable will probably also make the business more profitable. You need to explain to them that this is good for them, your business, the community and far beyond.

You have covered all you need to teach them by reading the previous articles. As a summary, here is a list of some of the points that you should teach them. Of course, you are welcome to teach more of what you learned—or encourage them to read the articles.

- It doesn't matter what each person's political or personal view on environmental issues is. To keep up with new regulations and increase the business' profit margins, they must get on board with being more environmentally friendly. In addition, the customers, particularly the younger ones, are becoming more environmentally friendly, and you need new younger customers to grow your food service business.
- Small things matter. If every staff member does something small to cut back on waste of products, supplies, or food, there will be great results for the environment and the bottom line. For example, if one server uses five less straws a shift, that is over 1,750 straws per year per server!

## Amazing Examples

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- Everyone is in this together. Chefs, owners, and staff must always be on the lookout for new ideas to save energy, water, reduce plastic, etc. Further, staff must feel free to bring these ideas to management's attention.



- It's easy to reduce water, electricity, and gas. Turn the faucets, switches, and knobs off unless they absolutely need to be on. (Ask your staff to walk with you when you perform an environmental audit.)
- Recycling is not 100% efficient. A lot of recyclable products don't get recycled, and what does, takes energy and water to recycle it into something new. The best thing to do is not use single use products, like water bottles in the first place.
- Sustainability means that something can go on for a long time. For example, seafood sustainability means that the fish grow to maturity and reproduce faster than they are caught.
- Climate change includes not only global warming but all weather aspects connected with it. For example, more severe storms, flooding, hurricanes of higher strength in areas that don't normally get them. The food service industry, because of its extensive use of plastics, electricity, and gas, contributes to climate change.
- People look up to chefs as rock stars. What chefs teach to their staff and to their customers will have a great impact on the environment.
- Food waste is a major environmental problem in the United States. It requires a lot of energy and water and chemicals (like fertilizer) to grow the food and then transport the food that is wasted. It takes energy to prepare the food. It then needs to get hauled

away to the dump if it is wasted. All of this costs money to the business your staff works in.

- Composting is much better than throwing the food out, but it is better to not waste the food in the first place. Order only what is needed and prepare only what will be needed.
- Everyone, particularly management and front-of-house, need to market your environmental friendliness policies and practices. Make more money by saving the world.

The previous ten sustainability articles have shown you how you can make yourself and your food service business more sustainable and more environmentally friendly. This article features a number of businesses and organizations that have shown for many years that you can be more environmentally friendly and succeed not only in making a difference but succeed financially as well.

Please note that this article covers companies from the beginning to the end of food service. It features everything from an aquafarm for oysters to the largest coffee farm in the United States to Green Certified restaurants, corporate dining, and food repurposing and composting.

### **CARLSBAD AQUAFARM, CARLSBAD, CA**

The Carlsbad Aquafarm is an example of full circle environmental considerations.

In 1954, the Encino power plant was built next to the aquafarm and used the water in the lagoon opening to the Pacific to cool its system. Today, the same pipes are used by a desalination plant. To get to the desalination plant, the water passes past the oyster farm. Thus, in creating 15% of the drinking water for the people of San Diego County, the desalination plant pulls in fresh, nutrient-rich water for the oysters. The oysters pre-filter the water of nutrients and algae before it enters the desalination plant. This is a symbiotic relationship where both operations benefit each other.

The Carlsbad Aquafarm sells oysters and mussels direct to the public and to some markets. They have several unusual practices that get their product to market faster and, they feel, with better results. These include off-bottom suspension farming with manual tumbling while the oysters are in the bay and a rinse bath before being sold. This means their oysters can be market size in 11 months instead of the usual 18-22 months and don't have a muddy taste.

All the filtering of the water by the oysters and mussels means that the once "stinky water" is quite



clean, and the lagoon has become home to several endangered species.

Continuing their environmental stewardship, they have even found a way to take their biggest waste product—oyster shells—and use them to help restore the environment of nearby waters by using them as calcium-rich foundations to rebuild local reefs.

The Carlsbad Aquafarm is in the process of pairing with wineries and brew pubs to have oyster pairing nights to not only increase their sales and expose the farm to new markets, but also to promote their environmental work.

### **KAUAI COFFEE, KAUAI, HAWAII**

Kauai Coffee, on the island of Kauai in Hawaii, is the largest coffee grower in the United States.

Agricultural practices in the sugar and pineapple era of Hawaii were very hard on the environment, especially the soil. When Fred Cowell took over as the general manager of Kauai Coffee in 2015, he began a series of changes and adopted multiple policies that were not only good for the environment but were better for his employees and yielded more cups of coffee. Taking it further, the coffee taste greatly improved as well. And with that, sales greatly increased.

Mr. Cowell knew that better coffee came from trees that were in better soil. Healthy soil is capable of absorbing excess carbon from the atmosphere, which helps minimize the causes of global climate change. In 2017, Kauai Coffee set out to make the soil better by adding back to the farm's nearly four million trees, composting from parts of the harvested material and processing parts that were not going into

the coffee roasters. What started as an unused waste product taking up space turned into an asset saving the company approximately \$300,000 a year in supplemental soil nutrients. With the nitrogen increasing in the soil naturally, the trees started producing more and better beans.

Kauai Coffee also started planting cover plants between the trees. Combined with composting, this greatly reduced soil compaction, which has many benefits, including less irrigation per tree. As a result, the cost of water went down, and the cost of electricity to pump the water went down. Since Kauai Coffee uses the same hydro system as much of the Island, less irrigation meant more water available for hydro-generation. This results in less fossil fuels being burned at the Island's generating plant.

Mr. Cowell stressed that sustainability does not just mean environmental sustainability but includes the responsibility to farm and do business sustainability for the community, employees, and the environment. He also emphasized that sustainability means providing a better life – off and at work – for employees, because they are the ones who make the company run, and run more environmentally sustainable. It includes ensuring workers' rights and following sustainability protocols. Mr. Cowell references with pride to Kauai Coffee's Rainforest Alliance Certification and its Fair Trade US certification.



## FLEA STREET, MENLO PARK, CALIFORNIA

Chef Jesse Ziff Cool opened Flea Street Cafe 43 years ago. She did not start out with the idea of becoming known around the country for being one of the pioneers of farm-to-table, seasonal, local seafood, or grass-fed beef dining. According to Chef Cool, her motivation was to incorporate old-world food values into the American food system.

Chef Cool has two very unusual philosophies for the foodservice industry.

1. There is no FOH or BOH. Everyone on staff is HOH, heart-of-house. Every staff member is important, and she treats everyone that way.
2. The guest comes last. Yes, you read that correctly – the guest comes last. With the guest coming last, the guest ends up receiving the best food products, prepared and served in the best way.

The old-world values included food produced in environmentally friendly and sustainable ways by producers who took personal interest in what they were

providing. But Chef Cool has always gone way beyond that. To Chef Cool, it is important to not only know where food comes from and how it was produced, but to know and appreciate/respect the story and lives of the people who produce the food. It is important to her to know the farmer, the person who caught the fish, and the people who produce the cheese. “You not only have to get to know them, but you have to treat them well. They are important to your business, and you have to remember that when working with them.” Appreciating their products, listening to what they recommend for you, and paying them promptly gets you the best ingredients.

Besides these old-world values, Flea Street has adopted new-age environment conservation issues including outdoor solar lighting, energy efficient indoor lighting, use of only environmentally friendly cleaning products, use of water purifiers to minimize plastic and glass bottles for both sparkling and flat water, and composting all green matter. Some of these practices go back over 40 years, some have been adopted recently. In other words, it is important to adopt and continue to follow good environmental and sustainable practices while at the same time look for new procedures as well.

Flea Street Cafe has very little turnover. Chef Cool realized many years ago that staff turnover is inefficient, expensive, and doesn't yield a great dining experience. Staff want to feel appreciated, they want to be paid well, and they want to be treated with respect. Chef Cool has been doing that for years. And when the staff is happy, respected, and appreciated, the guests receive food that was produced in environmentally friendly ways, well prepared, and served by people who really care about the guests because they are all vested in the restaurant doing well.

Chef Cool emphasizes that the bottom line will be improved, the guests will be happy, and the business will thrive when you adopt the philosophy that: “the guest comes last,” and “when you take care of your people, everything else will follow.”

## Conclusion

What you have learned in this, and the previous articles, is that you and your staff can and must make a difference in the world. You might have to think a bit differently. From designing and operating your food service facility to setting the menu and ordering to handling product to the unused and wasted food to working with your staff, there are things you can and must do to make a difference.

