

# CHEFS AS LEADERS

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*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead*

Congratulations! You are over halfway through this one-year program on environmental and sustainable issues for chefs, owners, and cooks.

You have covered some very serious topics which have major impacts for you, your communities, your food service business, your country, and even the whole world. By now, you have learned many things that you can do at your establishment to improve the environment, and you have learned some more sustainable practices.

However, you are probably thinking that you and your business can change but you don't have the ability to change others. The good news is that you are wrong! This is one of the few times that being wrong is a good thing. You can! Your business can!

Chefs and restaurants have power beyond their kitchens and dining areas, and beyond their brick-and-mortar walls. Chefs have become icons, role models, trend setters, and influencers in the past thirty years. A few examples:

- **Gordon Ramsay** may be quite controversial, but he has had an impact on how regular television viewers think about food and the duties of a cook.
- **Robert Irvine** explained to the average person the importance of food costs, cleanliness, and customer service, and that a restaurant is a business and needs to be run like one in *Restaurant Impossible*.
- **Jamie Oliver** used his position as a celebrity chef to start several campaigns on nutrition.
- **Alice Waters** was one of the creators of the farm to table movement and has been instrumental in changing the way Americans look at the food served at schools.

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- **Thomas Keller** showed us all in the industry that the American food scene was second to no one. He created enough of an interest in high-end food to inspire people for generations to try food at high-end establishments (and pay high-end prices). Tasting menus have now become a relatively common scene after the French Laundry opened in 1978.
- **Emeril Lagasse** brought new and exciting dishes to households of millions of people who then either tried to make the dishes they never knew existed or go out and order those dishes.
- **Iron Chef Jose Garces** has a 40-acre farm and founded the Garces Foundation with a mission to educate children about the nutritional benefits of sustainable agriculture, meal preparation and healthy eating.
- **Dan Barber**, a name well known to most chefs, is a "chef thinker" who likes to educate, train, and write about the philosophy and ethical issues of food. He likes to explore the world of food beyond farm to table and in his writings, he has proposed revolutionary ways of ethical (and delicious) eating. He has shown us that food not only has to be sustainable but delicious as well.

And, just as important is you and your food service business. You modified your procedures to deal with Covid. You handled food shortage and supply chain issues. You already know how to change and go with the flow.



Furthermore, you have already learned several things that can increase your profits by increasing your sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. Here is a baker's dozen ideas of other ways that you can spread the word, promote your business, and increase your own visibility while saving the world and make more money:

1. Partner with a local farm or farmer, cattle raiser, dairy, cheese maker, etc., and have seasonal dinners on a reservation basis for your guests featuring your partners' products. Make sure that your partners can come to the dinners.
2. Partner with a local winery, brewery, or distillery and have a similar dinner on a monthly or seasonal basis. Make sure your partners can come and mingle with your guests.
3. Volunteer to talk at local civic organizations or have meetings for them at your establishment. Tell them you want to talk about environmental efforts by local restaurants and chefs to improve the environment.
4. Use social media to promote your environmental efforts. If you are not personally savvy on this, find someone in your establishment who is, or hire a consultant. By the way, be careful to respond to social media posts about you in a positive and upbeat way.
5. Make sure your website clearly features what you are doing and what you stand for.
6. Don't forget low-tech methods. Table tents and inserts in bill presenters are good. But remember to train your servers on word of mouth: "Good evening. I will be serving you tonight. Can I get you a beverage? By the way, we only serve straws or water on request because we are working to minimize our environmental footprint. Our special tonight features sustainable striped bass which is on the Seafood Watch List as a best choice. It is served with sauteed local mushrooms delivered this morning. It tastes great!"
7. Make sure that guests know why you are minimizing packaging on your to-go orders.
8. Volunteer to talk at the local public interest radio station or have them (or the television station) come for lunch or dinner. This is an opportunity for great publicity for your establishment, and you are spreading the word on climate change and environmental issues.



9. Invite the local food critics (paper, online, radio, tv, etc.) to dinner to show off your environmental and sustainable practices. Again, great publicity.
10. Volunteer to talk at ACF chapter meetings and events about what you have learned in these training programs.
11. Find out what community events, like street fairs or concerts in the park, will let you set up a table to talk about environmental issues. Of course, you will have the name of your establishment plainly on the table.
12. Contact the local culinary programs in high schools, community colleges, etc., and volunteer to talk to students there or ask if they want to arrange a field trip to see what local establishments (with yours as a leader) are doing to improve the environment and increase sustainability. This is also a great way to recruit employees while spreading the message of sustainability.
13. Contact your local environmental non-profit agencies, your local college environment programs, etc., and ask about giving a presentation for them. Or ask them to come to your establishment and give presentations to you, your staff, or schedule a special event for your patrons. Some organizations to consider include Sierra Club, Climate Reality Project, The Nature Conservancy, etc. Be reciprocal and go to their meetings and present as well. That gets you and your establishment known in the environmental community which can increase your business.

Want more ideas? Just ask anyone you know who is trained, experienced, or interested in helping the environment (don't forget kids and family members), and you will get many more ideas.

The key point to remember is that people look up to you as cooks, chefs, and owners. They respect and admire what you and your establishments are doing. Use that power and respect to make the world a better place. And yes, you can make more money while doing it!

