

Green Dining: Initiatives Within The Restaurant Industry

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Going green with your restaurant can go a long way. Everywhere you turn, talks of climate change, carbon footprints, and waste buildup are unavoidable. Sustainability has become a hot topic, and for good reason.

It's made its way into the foodservice industry, too. **A 2019 survey by Culinary Visions Panel** found that 83% of consumers wished restaurants would use more environmentally-friendly practices. Not only is it a fantastic way to boost your marketing and expand your target audience, but you can feel good knowing your business is doing its part to take care of the planet and create a more sustainable future.



But, you may not fully know how to reduce your carbon footprint. Let's take a deeper look into what that actually means, what other restaurants are doing, and how you can make a positive impact on the future of the environment.

Understanding Your Restaurant's Carbon Footprint

You've probably heard of the term "carbon footprint," but maybe you don't fully know what it is or how to calculate exactly what your restaurant is contributing in terms of emissions.

A carbon footprint takes several factors into account:

- Heat
- Recycling
- Electricity
- Transportation

Anything that emits carbon gases into the air is considered to be part of your carbon footprint. In a kitchen, that can be more things than you might realize.

If you're not sure what your kitchen's (or front of house's) carbon footprint is, start by taking a look at your everyday practices. How much electricity do you use? How much water is being wasted? What does your supply chain look like? Once you're able to factor those things in, it's easy to calculate your carbon footprint and learn where you can do better.

What is Already Being Done?

There are several areas of any restaurant that could be considered problematic for the environment. Perhaps the biggest is food waste. Restaurants in the U.S. generate 22-33 billion pounds of food waste each year. How does that affect the environment? It starts with all of the energy it takes for that food to grow. It then has to be harvested, prepared, and transported, all wasting valuable energy for that food to be thrown away.

Thankfully, the restaurant industry as a whole is vowing to make a change. The National Resources Defense Council started holding a "food waste" challenge for restaurants, and many popular chains are already doing what they can to reduce waste. Most Panera Bread locations across the country, for example, donate bread each day to area food pantries and homeless shelters.

Another major issue in the restaurant industry is wasted energy. A lot of that comes from heating, cooling, and lighting. Nowadays, making simple changes in those areas can make a big difference. Even national franchises like Applebees are doing their part, with one restaurant retrofitting with LED lighting to save energy and become more sustainable. If you run your own restaurant, switching out your lighting is a quick and easy way to do something good for the environment (and save money, in the long run!)

Looking at green initiatives in the industry can help to inspire you to take the reins at your restaurant, and starting an environment of sustainability.

What Can You Do?

Now that you understand the importance of eco-friendly practices, how can you easily incorporate them into your restaurant? A good rule of thumb is to start small. Any initiative is better than none! There are plenty of little ways to make your business more sustainable, including:

- Reducing your food waste
- Investing in energy-efficient appliances
- Swapping out conventional cleaners for natural ones
- Growing your own produce
- Recycling

Getting your staff on board will make a big difference. Implementing a recycling plan, or making sure water isn't being wasted are small steps that can have a large impact. Make sure your dishwashers are working efficiently and all of your equipment and pipes are up-to-date so they aren't leaking.

When you make these green efforts within your restaurant, make sure you're following the proper health and sanitation codes necessary to keep your establishment in business. Cutting back on energy usage and water is important. But, properly washing and sanitizing, and keeping your food at safe temperatures is crucial for the safety of your patrons.

Establishing a more sustainable restaurant isn't impossible. Take small steps to start, and you might be surprised at how quickly they turn into large strides. As a result, you'll be doing your part to reduce your carbon footprint, and appealing to the desires of your customers with their own sustainability efforts.