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Work Smart, Dine Smart

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Work Smart, Dine Smart

Megan O'Neill

Dr. MacEnulty

Honors Research Seminar

3/29/10

“If you want one year of prosperity, plant corn. If you want ten years of prosperity, plant trees. If you want one hundred years of prosperity, educate people.” (Chinese Proverb)

Throughout the past decade, the act of practicing sustainability, slow food, and local food has only gained recognition and acceptance. However, with our population growing significantly, simply talking about it is no longer enough. Industries, foodservice in particular, is past due merely talking about how to fix the problem; it is time to make a change. There are so many done in the restaurant industry that contributes to the fall of our ecosystem. Considering Americans spend 48 percent of their food budget on food consumed outside the home, restaurants and those who work in them have a great deal of responsibility in rescuing the health of our planet. Fortunately, there are many ways we as companies and as individuals can make a difference everyday with minor changes in our daily routines, from water conservation, to compost and recycling, and so much more. Organizations such as the Green Restaurant Association are also making considerable strides in mending what has been nearly destroyed. Recognizing the amount of time and money not only Americans, but others throughout the world, put into dining out on a regular basis can help drastically change the “ecological footprint” the foodservice industry made.

Though the United States is typically viewed as “bigger and better,” people often fail to look past that into the bigger and “badder” problems that come as a result. There are a multitude of activities that occur in kitchens and restaurants as a whole that contribute daily to the damage of our environment, many of which are an easy fix. The problem is that people are uneducated, or simply do not care because it might involve a modest increase in money payout. However, looking at the long run effects both money and the environment would be affected favorably.

One of the most important issues involves water consumption. “The average foodservice facility uses 300,000 gallons of water per year” (GRA). This water waste requires a substantial amount of money to buy, heat and dispose of. With a minimal amount of effort resolving this problem could be easily accomplished. For one, prevent dripping faucets from going unrepaired. Though the amount at one particular time may seem miniscule, add that up through a week, or even a month and gallons of water have been wasted on absolutely nothing. In the foodservice industry a method to thaw frozen foods that is often used is that of running water. Though this is an effective technique to quickly get the job done, it should not be used on a daily basis. This procedure should be reserved for last minute, desperate situations. Simply forgetting to pull your product the night before, especially when on a regular basis, is poor preparation on the individual and their supervisor’s part.

Waste and trash is another imperative issue that needs to be addressed. Reducing this involves so much more than recycling and composting. A decrease in trash is an excellent way for restaurants to cut cost. Executive chef Gordon Wicks at the Red Fox Inn in Middleburg, VA was able to implement a program to cut their waste by \$15,000 per year within only three months of being hired. He was able to achieve this by working smart throughout each step of the food cycle. Prep lists are made accurately to ensure overproduction is not an issue, what can be composted always is, which goes to the farms along with other usable product. Chef Wicks is also very knowledgeable of where his product comes from, much of it from the farms they send their compost to creating a wonderful cycle of conservation. Beginning with bad product only leads to excess waste, both of the food and the money, along with over ordering perishables.

The waste of grease has also elevated greatly, though it can be used in other ways. For one, simply not taking care of the grease and allowing it to wash down sink and floor drains will

only cause problems that are expensive to fix later on. Furthermore, properly disposing of said oil and grease can actually be beneficial to the restaurant. A new invention such as the vegawatt is an innovative way to turn this wasted grease into electricity that is capable of generating up to ten percent of the restaurants needs, on site. Another relatively new resourceful way to provide on-site energy is that of solar panels. “The sunlight the Earth receives in thirty minutes is equivalent to all the power used by humankind in one year.” (GRA) Though many homes and business have begun using this resource, the foodservice industry has yet to really tap into it. Jim Bell, a San Diego mayoral candidate says, “If we only covered 20 percent of what’s already covered by parking lots and buildings with solar cells, our region could be completely energy efficient.” (GRA) Sous chef Josh Fluck at the Joseph Ambler Inn* in North Wales, Pennsylvania says they will soon be adding solar panels to their establishment. Their current energy company will give credit toward their bill for the amount saved through the use of this resource.

Energy efficient equipment is a further way to preserve energy at home and in restaurants. The energy star program has been around for almost two decades, beginning in 1992, initially dealing with computers and monitors. This idea began as a collaboration between the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Department of Energy with the purpose of encouraging behaviors that save energy. Though many home appliances have been energy star recognized for quite some time, quickly moving into the foodservice industry as well. There are currently six pieces of equipment suitable for restaurants and industrial kitchens including:

- Fryers
- Ice machines

- Hot food holding cabinets
- Steam cookers
- Dishwashers
- Solid door refrigerators
- Freezers

In the article *What You Need to Know About the Energy Star Program* by Lorri Mealey, the steam cooker in particular is discussed. “A steam cooker with the Energy Star label is up to 90% more efficient than a model without it. That equals an annual savings of over \$4000 in water and energy costs.” This not only demonstrates the energy savings, but also the money the restaurants could be putting towards something more useful.

Recycling is an area that continues to gain popularity, though it is still often overlooked. Many states require restaurants to include recycling bins in their establishment, though it is the placement of these bins that is important. Simply putting them in one location in order to abide with the law is not effective. During a busy night in the middle of service, a line cook is not going to walk across the kitchen simply to toss a can. It is important to strategically situate the bins in high traffic areas for optimum recycling. Also, informing current employees and training new ones about the program is vital. Airlie Conference Center in Warrenton, VA has been a great supporter of the go green movement. A packet is given to each new member of the staff educating them on what can be recycled and where the proper containers are positioned throughout the property.

Though individually making an effort pointless at times, every extra endeavor contributes to making a huge impact. While dining out, concentrate on places that also focus on eco-friendly practices. The Green Restaurant Association has three levels of certification standards based

upon how efficient the establishment runs. The sticker is placed on the window of the restaurant to allow potential customers to observe the attempt and to what extent the company has made for this cause. Furthermore, simply beginning to recycle and compost at home, and possibly forming a link with local farmers to donate to can help immensely. Operating smart while at work and encouraging others to follow is also a beneficial practice.

Johnson & Wales University has made vast advancements over the last three years alone in going green. In 2008 Chef Paul Malcolm was one of few chefs condoning the composting program. He would bring personal buckets to and from home to his labs encouraging his students to participate. A mere two and a half years later each lab contains composting buckets accumulating to approximately 150,000 pounds of compost each year. Recycling bins are also present in each lab with a majority of the chefs closely inspecting what is actually placed in the receptacles. Chef Malcolm, working alongside Chef Robert Brener and a number of students, has begun a garden on campus beginning in March, 2010. Their goal is to raise community awareness of sustainable practices, and the personal connection to food. Honeybees were a recent addition in the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. Honey has been produced and is currently being sold in the book store for the public to buy.

Many people feel they are eco-friendly when working at home, purchasing energy star items, shopping smart at grocery stores, and recycling. However, many seem to forget when they go out they may be supporting the bad habits they attempt to stray from. Geetie Singh, the owner of an organic gastropub, The Duke of Cambridge, explains, "While people might apply an ethical philosophy to their food purchasing when they're at the supermarket, when they go out to eat, they feel they're off the hook." Our nation is past due on resolving the impact our ecological

footprint has made on this earth. It is time to stop talking, and begin making a change that will be eternally valuable.