

Tools by Tourism Sector

Food Services

When it comes to sustainable business practices, the food services sector faces a unique set of challenges. That's not to say positive changes aren't within easy reach. From how to deal with kitchen scraps and leftover food to energy use in cooking, your business can help make a positive contribution. (Please note that we adapted much of the material in this section from *Food for Thought: Restaurant Guide to Waste Reduction and Recycling*, published by the City of San Francisco Solid Waste Management Program.)

Quick Start



Take a minute to stop and smell the trash. Evaluate what your business throws away. Are you maximizing the potential of everything before it heads for the dumpster? Is it possible to reuse or recycle some of your waste? Can you donate or sell some portion to someone else? A large portion of garbage from restaurants is food waste, much of which can be reduced by proper food storage, good purchasing practices and preparing food to order, or can be diverted by simple composting programs and partnerships with local farmers, food banks and shelters. Read on for some detailed tips on how you can reduce your waste and save money at the same time!

- ◆ Consider joining a recognized certification program, such as British Columbia's Green Table Network. Such programs offer a thorough audit of your operation, and an affiliation seal that communicates your responsible choices to your customers.

Case Study: Smart Cuisine

Toronto Chef [Jamie Kennedy](#) is renowned for the world-class dishes he plates up at his three restaurants, but his patrons go home at the end of the evening with more than just an unforgettable meal; they also leave with a healthy conscience. The restaurateur makes every possible effort to source seasonal ingredients from local producers, which cuts down on carbon emissions from shipping and supports the local economy. As a side benefit, the menus are always evolving to reflect what is in season. Diners are also provided with a copy of [SeaChoice: Canada's Seafood Guide](#) so that they can verify that the fish they order is on the group's "Best Choice" list. Staff is also ready and willing to discuss the restaurant's conservation practices with patrons.

Kennedy's support of local enterprises doesn't end with purchasing; he also supports several non-profit organizations through participating and organizing events such as Feast of Fields and Empty Bowls, and has spoken for causes such as the Endangered Fish Alliance, World Wildlife Foundation, Seafood Watch and the Living Ocean Society. He also co-founded the Knives and Forks Alliance, a group of chefs and farmers with a shared commitment to promoting mixed farming and locally grown produce.

Food Waste

In the restaurant sector, food is the single largest source of both monetary and ecological waste. Throwing it away is like throwing away money. Here are some ideas for stemming the flow.

- ◆ If customers continually return food uneaten, consider serving smaller portions.
- ◆ Prepare food to order.
- ◆ Ensure your staff prep food by trimming only what is not needed.
- ◆ Make sure that you store food at the proper temperature to keep it from spoiling.
- ◆ Check all food at delivery to ensure none is rotten or damaged.
- ◆ Date all food when it is delivered and rotate your stock to use everything in a timely manner.
- ◆ Reconstitute starchy vegetables that have wilted by trimming off the very bottom and immersing them in warm water for 15-20 minutes.

Rethinking "Waste Disposal" as "Resource Recovery"

Even when you minimize spoilage and waste, there is often still a great deal of material in line for the dumpster. Much of this can be further diverted from landfills with recycling and composting programs.

Recycle

These days there are recycling programs pretty much everywhere you go and many will come and pick up your materials. Check out what is available in your area and then start diverting! Place recycling bins next to garbage bins and educate staff and customers with information signs. It's as easy as taking out the garbage with the added bonus that you're doing your part to keep useful materials out of landfills.

Compost

Compost is recycling of organic wastes. You can compost everything from coffee grounds and filters to eggshells, fruits and vegetables. Instead of throwing all of these kitchen scraps in the garbage, set up a compost bin to create nutrient-rich compost for potted plants and flower, herb and vegetable gardens. If you don't have room for a compost bin or don't have any use for compost, find a local farmer or gardener who can use it. Growing numbers of communities now have organic waste collection. For more information, check out the [Composting Council of Canada](#)

- ◆ Local charities may also have pick-up programs for your old uniforms, furniture and appliances to give these products a new life.
- ◆ Think of grease and used cooking oil resources with a potential second life as biodiesel or other products. Many organizations will even pick them up from you for no charge.

Reduce your Waste

There are several other ways that you can reduce waste and at the same time reduce your own costs.

- ◆ Place rubber mats around dishwashing areas to cushion any dishes that fall. This also has an added benefit of minimizing employee injury due to slipping on wet floors.
- ◆ Use ceramic mugs and cups for drinks instead of disposable cups.
- ◆ Minimize take-out or take-home packaging; consider recyclable or biodegradable options.
- ◆ Use refillable bulk containers for condiments such as salt, pepper, ketchup, mustard and sugar.

Cloth v. Paper Napkins

Many food-service providers have successfully reduced their waste by switching to cloth napkins. There are many arguments for and against cloth napkins. Here are some thoughts to keep in mind when deciding which option is right for you:

- 1) What image do you want to present to your customers?
High-end food services usually prefer cloth napkins to paper.
Fast-food and take-out food services usually prefer paper napkins.
- 2) Cloth napkins cost more initially, but can be reused.
- 3) When choosing cloth napkins, look for products that come from organically produced cotton, hemp, or flax-this greatly increases the napkins' "green factor" as it cuts down on harmful pesticides and chemical fertilizers used in production.
- 4) Make sure that you choose durable cloth napkins so they can be reused many times before needing to be replaced. This means a cost savings for you!
- 5) Wash your cloth napkins with phosphate-free, biodegradable detergent and use an energy efficient washer-you will really notice the water savings versus a conventional washer.
- 6) When choosing paper napkins, specify those made from recycled material and produced in a bleach-free process. See "Try This!" below for info on Greenpeace's "Shopper's Guide to Ancient Forest Friendly Tissue" for tips on finding green-friendly brands.
- 7) Bleach-free napkins can be composted.
- 8) When choosing paper napkins, talk to your supplier about adding your company name and logo on the napkins, and some indication that it is made from recycled material. Include the percentage of post-consumer content.
- 9) Whatever you decide, let your customer know what you are doing and the reasons why. Check out the [Marketing](#) section of this toolkit for tips on how to do this.

- ◆ Dispense straws from approved sanitary containers instead of using individually wrapped ones.
- ◆ Use reusable coasters instead of napkins.
- ◆ Local schools, churches and daycares may welcome your used buckets, pails and large boxes for crafts and games.

Where Does Your Food Come From?

More and more consumers are interested in where their food is sourced. Partnerships with local producers will support the local economy and give you fresh, seasonal food unique to your region-something travellers especially value!

Try This!

Consider starting an organic herb garden in or just outside your restaurant. Customers will enjoy the pleasant aromas and tastes that only fresh herbs can give your recipes. As an added bonus, you can use your compost to help your garden grow.

Sustainable Seafood

SeaChoice is a non-profit organization that provides sustainable seafood purchasing information to consumers and businesses. The group also provides a ratings system to help buyers to make the best choice. Check out [SeaChoice](#) for more information and to obtain "Canada's Seafood Guide" to help with your own purchasing and customer education.

Local v. Organic Food

Many people become confused when it comes to organic and locally produced food. Organic food is grown without the aid of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, genetic modification, or antibiotics and hormones in animals. It can be sourced from anywhere around the world. Local food is produced in your local region but is not necessarily organic. Locally grown food supports regional producers and produces fewer emissions related to shipping the food to market.

Ideally, try to find local producers who use organic methods. When this is not possible, choose local for fruits and vegetables that are in season. You may want to go organic when it comes to meat, eggs and dairy products, as many people have health concerns related to these food products.

Whichever option you choose, make sure to share this with your customers, as many people value the use of local or organic ingredients.

- ◆ Consider purchasing "Fair Trade" coffees and teas.

Try This!

Check out local farmers markets and talk to the producers. You can find a listing of farmers markets across Canada at [Travel to Wellness](#) and [Chef2Chef](#). Or you can find local producers in your area at [CanadianFarmersMarket.com](#).

If you're still at a loss, try the phone book's business pages under farmers markets, natural and organic foods, health foods retail, grocers wholesale, poultry wholesale, food distributors, or arts and crafts retail.

Or Google it! Try searching for farmers market, local food, organic food, food co-operative or food buying club-and don't forget to put in your location to get results close to you.

The Perfect Cup O'Joe

"Fair Trade" organic and shade-grown coffee is the most responsible coffee choice you can make. Fair Trade means farmers are paid fairly for their beans. "Organic" means that no harmful pesticides were used in cultivation. "Shade Grown" means farmers grow the coffee plants underneath the tree canopy, leaving trees for migrating birds to stop for a rest. Try a cup for yourself-you'll satisfy your taste buds and your responsible conscience.

Purchasing

- ◆ Minimize packaging by buying products in bulk.
- ◆ Avoid non-recyclable Styrofoam packaging if possible.
- ◆ To reduce packaging, buy meats in bulk and cut them up in your own kitchen.

Try This!

Check out Greenpeace's [Shopper's Guide to Ancient Forest Friendly Tissue](#). The organization rates brands of facial tissue, toilet paper, napkins and paper towels that are good for the Earth. Talk to your supplier about ordering these brands.

- ◆ Buy non-perishable products in the largest containers available to reduce packaging and the emissions associated with multiple deliveries of smaller quantities.
- ◆ Purchase 100% recycled, post-consumer waste or FSC-certified paper products for napkins, paper towels, menus, promotional materials and toilet paper. Or better yet, move to cloth napkins, warm-air hand dryers and electronic promotional materials.

What are FSC-Certified Products?

[Forest Stewardship Council](#) (FSC)-certified paper and products are manufactured from wood fibre that originated in well-managed forests, through verified recycled sources, or a combination of controlled forest-friendly sources. These products are identified by the FSC logo, which assures consumers they meet the highest environmental and social standards. This allows shoppers to select paper or wood products that support responsible and sustainable forest management practices.

Water

- ◆ When washing foods such as fruits and vegetables, fill a basin with water and wash them in the basin rather than running water in the sink.
- ◆ Run automatic dishwashers only when they are full.
- ◆ Put toilet dams in all your toilets-check out the [Accommodations & Lodging](#) section of this toolkit for more details.
- ◆ Consider "grey water" collection systems for watering gardens.

Energy

- ◆ Be sure to check with your region's energy utility. Many offer incentive programs such as rebates on upgrades to more energy-efficient fixtures and appliances.

Power Smart

[Manitoba Hydro](#) is increasing its customers' awareness of potential energy savings through its Power Smart Program, which promotes a wide range of efficiency products, services and programs. The utility helps its customers determine where they can become more efficient and provides information on how to do it. There is also a rebate incentive program to incentivize the purchase of Energy Star appliances as well as other efficiency methods.

- ◆ When upgrading or replacing appliances, specify only Energy Star models.
- ◆ Develop and implement a monthly cleaning and maintenance regimen for all of your appliances. This will maximize their efficiency and ensure they are operating safely.
- ◆ Install plastic strips or curtains in the doorways of walk-in freezers and coolers to minimize the amount of cold-air loss when opening the door.
- ◆ Defrost freezers on a regular basis-this keeps them working at peak efficiency.