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Sustainable Approaches

Small Efforts Can Pay Big Dividends in Your Operation

As organizations and operations move to a more sustainable approach to conducting business, momentum on this topic grows and opportunities are presented. It's generally perceived that implementing sustainable practices will only cost an operation additional dollars. Granted, there may be an initial cost, but when amortized, a savings will likely be recognized.

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LET'S FIRST briefly explore how we have come to understand sustainability and where it originated.

According to Holt Architects, sustainability, from the Latin *sustinere* (to hold up), is—in its broadest sense—the capacity to endure. In 1987 the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Others have challenged this definition, asking how any development can be sustainable. Many see sustainability as a balance of three overlapping and often competing systems: environment, economy, and society.

Achieving a balance to sustainable approaches can yield multifaceted benefits if properly applied. I'd like to reference a newer restaurant—The Grey Plume—that not only pushed the envelope on sustainability, but also stamped it, mailed it, and received a response that no other foodservice operation in the world had previously received. The Grey Plume in Omaha, Neb., is the first Green Restaurant Association 4-Star SustainaBuild™ restaurant in the country, and has accumulated more points than any other Certified Green Restaurant®.

The Grey Plume is the:

- First restaurant in the world to meet the SustainaBuild™ Standard
- First 4-star SustainaBuild™ Certified Green Restaurant®
- First Certified Green Restaurant® in Nebraska
- Nation's Greenest Restaurant
- Nation's Most Sustainable Restaurant

According to a white paper produced by the International Foodservice Manufacturers Association (IFMA) Foundation sponsored by ARAMARK, it's evident that applying a sustainability strategy will prove beneficial to an organization's bottom line, regardless of the industry sector. Sustainable practices are not only right for the environment, they also benefit the communities in which they serve. Sustainability is all around us. We are recognizing more regulations and ordinances that promote this fact. Employees, customers, and stakeholders expect businesses to act responsibly in this area.

Going green is not just a fleeting trend, but a concept and philosophy for both individuals and businesses. Today's CDM should be able to communicate the benefits and positive economic impact of sustainable practices, not only to the public, but also to the C-suite. While there is a dramatic need on all

levels to care for the environment, there is an equal need to convey to executives and stakeholders how these initiatives can benefit the company's reputation and financial success.

The Grey Plume is definitely leading the way with their initiatives. Granted, your organization is not likely going to be the next Grey Plume on the block; however, you can make choices to help promote sustainability and realize a cost savings. As you read the strategies that follow, contemplate how you can make a difference with these relatively easy-to-apply ideas in your operation.

THE HIGHER THE EFFICIENCY, THE GREATER THE SAVINGS

For this article, when discussing efficiencies within your operation we can draw a line dividing it into water and energy.

When you assess the amount of water that passes through your operation on a daily basis, you will likely be amazed. Depending on your industry segment and the size of the operation, you might use 500 to 5,000 gallons of water daily. Knowing this, efficiency is of the utmost importance for two reasons. First, water is a non-renewable natural resource. Second, water costs money. For these reasons many operations are implementing water-saving measures such as:

- Low-flow faucets and/or sprayers
- Water-efficient equipment such as dish machines, steamers, ovens, and stoves

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The Grey Plume creates innovative cuisine while maintaining traditional culinary roots in showcasing the food source and practicing a no-waste attitude in every aspect of the restaurant's operation.



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- Eco-shredders, non-water food disposal systems
- Sensor-activated water faucets
- Serving water only on customer request
- Not thawing items under running water
- Employee training

According to the National Restaurant Association (NRA), utilities represent 3 to 8 percent of an operation’s overall costs, so conserving energy can lower an operation’s utility bills and deliver meaningful savings. Today’s CDM should understand that good environmental stewardship can attract customers. The NRA’s 2013 Restaurant Industry Forecast shows increasing investment in energy-saving light fixtures and energy-saving equipment including refrigeration, air conditioning, and/or heating systems.

ENERGY RECOVERY

Another method to reduce electrical energy consumption is to recover it from a byproduct of the mechanical process. During the course of any dishwashing cycle, steam is produced. The steam is the result of heating water for wash and rinse cycles to the required temperatures. Most dishwashers require this steam to be vented, resulting in significant wasted heat.

Energy recovery enables the dishwasher to collect this steam and use it to preheat the inlet water, greatly reducing the energy needed for the water to reach a safe and sanitary temperature. This is accomplished by a fan that circulates the resulting steam from a dishwashing cycle past heat-exchange fins filled with 50°F to 80°F water. The difference in temperature causes the inlet water to heat to 150°F. This preheating significantly reduces

the amount of energy needed to boost the temperature of the inlet water to the required 180°F.

CHOOSING GREEN CLEANING SYSTEMS

The cleaning system is an area we can address from two different perspectives. To start, if you do not properly monitor your cleaning supplies you could literally be dumping dollars down the drain. Following are a few measures to help save money on cleaning supplies.

- Ensure that you are receiving the proper chemical or product.
- Check your dilution rates, as they typically will dilute to the high end of the tolerance spectrum. The more you use, the more you buy. It also means more chemicals dumped into the environment.
- Talk with the technician and ask questions.

The other side of the discussion on cleaning systems takes us into a green cleaning system. There are quality green cleaners (not chemicals) on the market. These green cleaners can be utilized to supply the cleaning room, dish machines, pot sinks, hood systems, bathrooms, etc. Most providers of cleaning agents should be able to talk with you about alternative options for a more environmentally-friendly approach to maintaining your operation at a high level of cleanliness. Ask your vendor about grease-eating cultures that will keep the grease trap virtually maintenance free. This in itself saves labor, maintenance, and cleaning, as well as the potential clogging of the trap if not properly maintained.

SUSTAINABLE FOODS

The typical thought about serving sustainable foods is that it’s too expensive to be practical in your operation. Sustainable foods are the types of foods that patrons are looking for when dining out. Knowing that customers are looking for them on your menu, how can you transition and introduce sustainable products to your customers?

- Communicate with your vendors.
- Get in tune with your local farmers.
- Purchase ingredients from as close to home as possible.
- Track the seasonality of ingredients and adjust menus when feasible.
- Learn where your ingredients are grown or raised.

What ingredients is your area known for? Try to focus on a local dish and see how it is received. Purchasing local can help to

REFERENCES

- IFMA Foundation Sustainability "How-to Guide" Series 2nd Ed., Sustainability in the Food Service Environment; A. Lewis, K. Cacciola & R.B. Dennill, 2011
- Holt Architects; <http://holt.com/content/view/sustainability-healthcare.html>
- National Restaurant Association; <http://www.restaurant.org/Industry-Impact/Conservation>
- The Grey Plume; http://greyplume.com/tgp_about_green_initiatives.php



feature something from your area. In addition, you can associate on various levels if you can attach an actual farmer or producer to the ingredient or dish. By doing so, you show that you are supporting the local community, stimulating the economy, as well as promoting employment. On the grand scale of things, you will be doing your part to reduce your carbon footprint.

RECYCLING AND FOOD WASTE

A recycling and a focused waste reduction program can reduce the refuse produced within your facility. When focusing on waste reduction, the following efforts can be introduced:

- Communicate with your vendor and tell them you want to know about products that address reduced packaging waste.
- Insist on recyclable packaging materials.
- Utilize earth-friendly disposable goods.
- Implement a recyclable sorting system in your kitchen, dining room, and potentially facility-wide.
- Implement organic (food waste) recycling. Contact local greenhouses or the city utilities as they may have composting programs that are willing to accept your organics.

The above measures can actually reduce dumpster pick-up and/or dumpster size.

GREASE AND OIL REDUCTION

Anytime I worked in the kitchen and didn't receive a hot fryer facial, it stacked up to be a good day. Now let's talk about grease and oil reduction methods. Fryers require a large amount of energy to run, keep hot, maintain, and overall station execution—including grease disposal and hood system cleaning and maintenance.

- When fried foods are necessary in your operation, transition to a hot air fryer.
- If doing away with the fryer is not an option, find a resource that will pick up your used fryer oil for recycling.
- To ensure maximum oil life, be careful not to contaminate with ice particles or seasoning (salt), be

careful of excessive heat, and be sure to filter as necessary (increased labor).

- New technologies in ovens can provide a hot air cooking capacity.

SUMMING IT UP

Now, after reading the various approaches, applications, changes or adjustments you can choose toward implementing sustainable practices into your daily operation, you should decide how to best make them happen. Many times it is more practical to start small, taking on little changes while having time to adjust. Anticipate the growing pains that are bound to occur. Stay the course. Be sure to communicate with your employees, customers, and stakeholders about the vision and benefits of your sustainability programs, and how you are going to see them through. ☺

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