



A recipe for success

John Turenne FCSI kicks off his new regular column on the growing importance of sustainability in foodservice

Mention the term “sustainable food” to most foodservice professionals and you may see a glazed look come into their eyes, they may break out in a cold sweat, mumbling something about “costs too much”, “too much work”, or simply “I don’t really get it”, as they look for a way out of the conversation. I understand – I’ve experienced these anxiety symptoms myself. But the good news is, there’s a tonic to help cure them.

Welcome to the new ‘Sustainability in Foodservice’ column and thanks for taking the time to read this. Just what exactly is sustainable food, you ask? Well, most dictionaries define the word sustainable as “the ability to carry on”. Simple enough, right? Then why would we make food decisions that may actually have an ill effect on people and the planet? Seems like a logical question.

Think recipe

We all understand the concept of a recipe. They mostly consist of two parts – a list of ingredients and a method to follow when using those ingredients. Let’s use that analogy to define sustainable food.

Ingredients (pillars)

When categorising sustainable food, there are four pillars (ingredients) to focus on. The impact the food system has on each of these can be the difference between unsustainable and sustainable. They are: environment; community; social; health and wellness.

But before we start doing anything with these ingredients, let’s clarify what the context of each one will be.

Environment addresses the physical impact our food system has on our planet. Ask yourself: ‘What influence do my food choices have on the ecosystem?’

Community focuses on the impact our choices have on small businesses, farms, artisans and diversity. Ask: ‘How do my decisions about where my food comes from affect my own community, as well as the global community?’

Social revolves around the responsibility of treating living things fairly and humanely. Ask: ‘Are we regarding people and animals justly?’

Health and wellness is about sustaining our own physical wellbeing. Ask: ‘Is the food we’re consuming helping to enhance or decrease our lifespan?’

Once we have the ingredients in place, we can move onto what to do with them.

Method (action)

- 1 Take the environment pillar and make decisions that have minimal impact on the planet. In the food’s production, know the input (chemical pesticides’ reliance on oil and effect on soil), the consumption of natural resources (water, energy/oil). When it comes to packaging, distribution, facility design and waste management, understand the effect each has on natural resources.
- 2 Then add the entire Community pillar and ask yourself who gains from your

choices in regard to every step in the food system? Support organisations that promote local business, diversity and who encourage the other three pillars of sustainable food.

- 3 Whisk in much of the Social pillar while learning about the issues surrounding fair labour practices on farms and in food manufacturing. Most links in the food system are good citizens in these regards. However, there are many who operate with disregard to humane principles. The same can be said for animal welfare in agricultural systems.
- 4 Finally, fold in all the health and wellness you can by understanding that human health has been deteriorating at a faster pace than in all of human history. Experts point to highly processed foods and the proportion of artificial ingredients. Incorporate fresh, whole ingredients to offset this.

This is a basic recipe, or summary, of sustainable foodservice. My future columns will focus on each of these pillars separately. We’ll talk about why each one is important and what is being done in our industry to become more sustainable. I look forward to cooking for change together. ■

John Turenne FCSI, is founder and president of Sustainable Food Systems, LLC, consultants with “a revolutionary perspective on foodservice”. sustainablefoodsystems.com