



Eating to live healthily

In his series about the four pillars of sustainable food, John Turenne FCSI turns his attention to the importance of health and wellbeing

I asked a class once: “How can I get kids to buy into the need to eat better food?” A student said: “Tell us you want to help us stop killing ourselves!”

This goes to the heart of the issue. How can we talk about sustainability without discussing how to sustain our own health and wellbeing?

We’ve already discussed the important issues around the other three pillars – environmental, community and social health. But let’s not forget that without our own bodies’ interests, none of those really matter.

Statistics don’t lie. For the most part, human health has deteriorated in the past several decades faster than the past few centuries. Unhealthy diets contribute to approximately 678,000 deaths each year in the US, due to diet-related diseases such as heart disease, cancer and Type 2 diabetes. In the past 30 years, obesity rates have doubled in adults, tripled in children, and quadrupled in adolescents. And yet with the advent of medical breakthroughs, we ask how we can get better at health treatment, while at the same time physically regressing.

The culprit most identified by experts has been the quality of our food. The one thing every one of us has in common to survive – nutritional sustenance – has conversely become our demise. Many of us are slowly deteriorating (or “killing ourselves” as my student said) because of what we put in our bodies.

The good news is that there has been

a strong movement to eradicate this trend. The good food movement (or Real Food, as I like to call it) has slowly begun to make its way into mainstream society. Both large and small foodservice establishments are beginning to see the responsibility they carry, or at least see the business opportunity.

Here are a few ideas of what we can do to tackle the issues around sustaining our wellbeing through diet.

Serve real food

The concern: For the sake of convenience, most of the food we serve has become highly processed. Ingredients lists often include names unidentifiable as food.

A remedy: Eat food from the earth and not from a lab. The fewer ingredients, the better. Look at the list of ingredients on a label. If you can’t identify them, chances are you don’t need them.

Eat seasonally

The concern: Too often we try to offer anything, anytime, anywhere. Serving fruits and vegetables out of season usually means they’ve been ‘manufactured’ for travel and have less nutritional value (not to mention the negative impacts this can have on the environment and the local community).

A remedy: Get yourself a seasonal food calendar. Most state departments of agriculture provide them online. When developing menus, allow for changes with the season. And when the season turns

to the colder months with less variety, use your culinary creativity to create unique ways to offer that winter squash. (Roasted squash makes a great pizza with ricotta cheese and maple syrup!)

Keep it simple

The concern: We often try to offer too many choices just to appease the clientele.

A remedy: Less is more. Spend more time on handling real, fresh food and less time on opening containers of processed food.

Send the right message

The concern: We get wrapped up in the process of using ‘healthy’ and ‘nutritious’ terminology. The consumer can get turned off or have a misconception of taste and quantity, with the feeling they are being lectured to.

A remedy: Turn the message around to advocate the addition of service, quality and taste. Rather than communicating what you’ve taken away, try telling the story of what you’ve added to the menu.

Does this mean we must do everything all at once? No. But we should try to address what we can manage. Pick what resonates most with you and what works within your system, and make a start there. But remember – never settle for mediocrity. Keep striving to do one more thing. ■

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