



Finding a remedy

We can all help to reduce global food waste and the impact our food supply has on the environment, says **John Turenne FCSI**

Welcome back to the sustainability in foodservice column. In the last issue we discussed the four pillars of sustainable food – environment, community, social, and health and wellness. This column focuses on the environment pillar – the physical impact our food system has on our planet. Start out by asking yourself: “What influence do my food choices have on the world around us?” The answer: A lot! The following are a few ecological concerns about food and a sample of ways we can begin to make a positive change.

1 Production/growing

The concern: Our agriculture supply is responsible for 30% of greenhouse gas emissions and around two thirds of the planet’s fresh water consumption. Industrial fertilizers and pesticides need huge amounts of fossil fuels to produce; they pollute the land and water and have even proven to be less effective over time – therefore creating a downward spiral, requiring even more use.

Remedy: Consider organic, integrated pest management or other environmentally-proven processes for agriculture production. Promote more plant-based protein. Prioritize seasonality on menus and get to know your farmer/producer and their means for food production.

2 Packaging

The concern: We’ve become a throwaway society. Over 6,000 substances are

approved for food contact. Forget about human health concerns for now (we’ll address that in a later column). Think about the energy, oil and materials needed to manufacture the packaging for foodstuffs. Ask yourself about the amount of waste created when it’s thrown away.

Remedy: Buy food in bulk, in-season and fresh. Promote reusable containers. More foodservice institutions have made the switch to minimally processed foods and cooking more from scratch, thereby reducing packaging.

3 Facility design

The concern: Foodservice facilities generally use five to seven times more energy per square foot than other commercial buildings.

Remedy: Maintain and repair equipment, audit and cut idle (non-productive) time. Invest in Energy Star-rated and LEED building design.

4 Waste management

The concern: In the US, we throw away 40% of the food we produce, and globally it is estimated that 30% to 50% of food produced is wasted before consumption. We can address the inexcusable societal ramifications of hunger in a later column under the social pillar. Think about the upstream environmental impacts (before it gets to the consumer) such as unnecessary fertilizer and water consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and transportation, as well as the

downstream impacts such as the disposal of all that unneeded food. And all for no good reason.

Remedy: Understand the US Environmental Protection Agency’s Food Waste Pyramid. Managing waste starts with producing less. Better forecasting, measurement and planning will reduce over production (and save money). When you inevitably have unused food, donate it to feed hungry people or animals, or compost it – in that order.

Experts are increasingly concerned about what they call the earth’s runaway food system. The way we produce food today has radically changed. It now has the power to alter the foundations of life, as we know it. As foodservice professionals we need to help society retake control of this runaway food system before it does more damage.

I accept that the remedies outlined here only begin to get to the heart of the problem. There are many more remedies that have proven effective. And remember, you don’t need to try and do everything at once. But everyone can do something. Identify one thing you can do and do it. And when you’ve accomplished that, do one more thing. ■

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