

Good Practices in the Operation of Green Restaurants. Goals of the Green tea Project in the Hospitality

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Introduction

A few years ago, it was enough for a restaurant to offer a unique menu full of delicious food, a cosy environment and friendly service, but nowadays it is not only the quality of the food and the behaviour of the staff that matters to consumers. Along with the guests, environmental awareness has crossed the threshold of restaurants and has become a criterion that increasingly influences consumers' choices and therefore the competitiveness of restaurants [1, 2, 3, 4].

In a survey conducted by the London-based Sustainable Restaurants Association, 80.0% of respondents said sustainability could be a deciding factor in their choice of restaurant. In fact, four out of five people surveyed expect their restaurant to do something about sustainability. But what exactly is sustainable hospitality and what does it mean for the day-to-day operational running of a restaurant? Sustainable catering involves restaurants that strive to minimise their ecological footprint. Such efforts include sourcing ingredients from local producers rather than multinationals, focusing on seasonal ingredients (the importance of seasonality is discussed in more detail in this manuscript), including a high proportion of vegan and vegetarian dishes on the menu, or using environmentally friendly packaging for delivery. International trends also show that sustainability has become an important part of the hospitality industry, with more and more competitions including sustainability in their evaluation criteria [5, 6].

GreenTEA international project with Portuguese, Croatian, Finnish and Hungarian partners started in 2023 and will end in 2026. Partners will each select and analyse 3 best practices in your own country at destination or small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) level. The first goal is to improve the educational background of green tourism in higher education by developing alternative educational materials and learning opportunities. Our task is, among other things, to look for good examples of green restaurants at home. This requires first a general introduction and then a survey form which competitors can be compared (benchmarking).

Overview

Tips for a sustainable restaurant's operations

Nose-to-tail movement: the nose-to-tail movement was founded by Fergus Henderson, owner of the Michelin-starred St. John's restaurant, who believes that "if you're going to slaughter an animal, it's only right to eat every part of it". The movement is about a kind of confrontation, often with the parts of animals that city dwellers have grown tired of seeing [7]. Some people eat only the breasts of chickens and only the best parts of cattle, the rest goes in the bin. Of course, the nose-to-tail kitchen philosophy does not only work for meat. Many more parts of fish can be processed, than we might think - in this case, the term fin to tail is used. Also, plants are not fully utilised - stem to root was born to combat this.

Local producers, excellent ingredients: 'Fresh, high-quality ingredients are a prerequisite for restaurant cuisine. One of the key ingredients for a restaurant is a basic requirement for a restaurant: the ingredients must be fresh and local. For me it's important to have a personal relationship, to work together. I know where the ingredients come from and how they are grown. They say you are what you eat... Let's eat quality food made from good ingredients, supporting the work of local small producers,' said Ricsi Farkas, chef at Pajta, in a previous article. One of the basic requirements for sustainable cuisine is that the production and transport of ingredients should be as environmentally friendly as possible - and working with local producers who grow seasonal food, do not exploit the land and emit as little carbon dioxide as possible during transport is a great way to do this [8].

Beyond the menu, there are many other ways to make a restaurant sustainable. From packaging, to food waste and waste management. Below, we've put together some useful tips that can not only help you do well for the environment, but also make your restaurant more competitive and responsible. Packaging is one of the biggest waste generators in a catering operation. Here you should not only think about takeaway cans, but also PET bottled drinks, packaging of ingredients from suppliers, takeaway cutlery, and even though it may seem small, small packaging (e.g. 5 gr sugar, honey, toothpicks, etc.) can also contribute greatly to a restaurant's environmental footprint [9, 10]. To prevent as much waste as possible, you only need to take a few small steps:

1. Replace the polystyrene packaging material (the foam packaging material similar to Styrofoam that restaurants use to wrap hot food)
2. Prefer to use your own boxes or join a deposit scheme such as RAKUN, Cupler, etc.
3. Do not offer PET bottled soft drinks. Please choose homemade juices, lemonades, etc.
4. Choose suppliers that are environmentally conscious like you and that reflect this in their operations (packaging, transport, sustainable sourcing)

Sustainable catering for waste management

Although there are restaurants that operate with almost zero waste, there will still be waste in the first steps, so we've put together some tips to help you manage waste in an environmentally responsible way [11].

-We know that you already collect waste from the tap, but it's probably the easiest way to manage your restaurant's waste in an environmentally responsible way. All you have to do is collect glass, paper, plastic, metal, hazardous waste and kitchen green waste separately.

-Once you've managed to separate your kitchen green waste, the best way to make the most of it is to compost it. This is covered in more detail in a previous article.

Sustainability by reducing food waste

30% of food waste is generated in the catering sector, which amounts to roughly 390 million tonnes of food per year. Food waste in catering is not only the leftovers left by guests, but also the waste that accumulates in the kitchen. We show you what you can do about it:

1. One of the most important steps is to clean up. If you regularly measure how much food waste your restaurant is generating, you can track not only the size of the problem, but also how it is evolving day by day, week by week.
2. Use as many of the ingredients in the kitchen as possible. For example, vegetable scraps can be used to make an excellent base juice, and unusual animal and/or fruit and vegetable parts can be used to create new dishes.
3. Serve smaller portions. Guests often leave leftovers on their plates, which are very difficult to handle in an environmentally friendly way. If you want to prevent this, offer the option of smaller portions.
4. Become a Munchpartner. Through Munch, you can sell good quality leftovers, realizing revenue you thought you had lost, which could save the salary of a full-time employee [12].
5. Munch is a platform through which restaurants, bakeries, shops and hotels sell unsold, but good quality food at a discount. With Munch.hu, you can easily fight food waste by eating well - at a good price! Munch.hu is accessible from your browser and via the phone app - we're constantly improving these based on feedback to make it as easy as possible for you to save food! Munch are packages that include surprise meals. These packs are available at a 40-70% discount. Any unsold but good quality food can be included in the Munch you create. When you upload a Munch, you give yourself the opportunity to sell a product that would otherwise go to waste and thus generate a loss. Selling a Munch makes up for your lost revenue, while offering PR value, as being on the platform shows that your business is committed to reducing waste.

Zero Waste Strategy

In 2013, Bea Johnson's Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying Your Life was published [5], and by 2015, everyone who was on social media was learning about fashion, drinking from metal straws, buying canvas bags and bamboo cutlery, demonizing plastic packaging and producing zero waste. Literally translated, that means zero waste. Daniel Knapp introduced his notion of total recycling; he and his wife showed that all the waste in landfill could be recycled and reused. Since the 2010s, the term has come to denote a way of life for individuals and communities that focuses on environmental conservation as zero waste movement [13]. The majority of the movement's followers admit that living waste-free in a society that is not designed for it is impossible.

“Don’t buy more, cook more, pick more than you can eat without leftovers” In 2016, the National Food Chain Safety Office launched its No Leftovers programme with the support of the European Union’s LIFE programme, which has since become Hungary’s national food waste prevention programme [14]. The main objective of the programme is to reduce food waste in Hungary and Europe, therefore, the programme is part of the No Leftovers [14]:

1. Tracking the amount of food waste generated in Hungarian households, which has also become an EU Member State obligation from 2020.
2. We pay special attention to raising children’s awareness, so we run a broad educational programme in which teachers are our main partners.
3. We help households to reduce food waste through awareness-raising and motivational messages, practical ideas and useful knowledge.
4. We collect and promote good practices on food waste prevention for all actors in the food chain.
5. We cooperate with other national and international programmes on food waste.

Food Is Not Rubbish! - The Hallmarks of Green Restaurants

The growing emphasis on environmental awareness in the world of gastronomy is demonstrated by the inclusion of a new category, Sustainability, in this year’s Dining Guide awards for the best restaurants in Hungary. But what are the important factors that make a restaurant eco-sustainable?

Local sourcing

This year’s Volkswagen Dining Guide Awards Sustainability Award went to Pajta in Mariszentpetrovsk, with the jury’s decision based primarily on the way the ingredients were sourced. Restaurants that put the farm-to-table concept into practice - buying ingredients from local producers - have a lower impact on the planet than those that use imported ingredients, avoiding the pollution associated with transport. And the icing on the cake is that they also support Hungarian producers.

Seasonal dishes

Bear’s onion dishes, strawberry delicacies? It may still seem strange to many of us, but restaurants that change their menus depending on the season and the month are likely to be environmentally conscious. After all, if you cook with seasonal ingredients, you are less burdening the planet with the ecological footprint of the ‘artificial’ environments built for vegetables and fruit and the chemicals that go into growing them.

Vegetarian and vegan options

The proportion of animal and plant-based ingredients on a restaurant’s menu is always a talking point in terms of awareness. Indeed, restaurants with a ‘meat with meat’ ethos are less likely to be considered green than those that also serve a variety of plant-based dishes, due to the larger ecological footprint of animal farming.

Environmentally friendly serving

This is the point that needs the least explanation: restaurants that use washable and reusable plates, cutlery and even napkins for serving have a much lower impact on the planet than their counterparts with single-use plastic. It is also worth asking whether the salt, pepper, olive oil and balsamic vinegar are in glass containers on the tables, or whether they can be ordered in separate packaging and measured out.

Different portions

Those restaurants that offer the possibility to request half portions (or small, medium and large portions) leave it to the consumer to order according to his or her appetite and/or stomach size. This potentially results in less food waste, as if we are less hungry, we do not miss out on a significant proportion of unnecessarily large portions.

Packs up the leftovers

At the same time, encouraging customers to take home any leftovers also helps the environment. This can be done by providing environmentally friendly food containers, mainly made of paper, or better still by allowing customers to take home their leftovers in their own containers.

Don’t throw away leftovers at the end of the day

As we have already pointed out in a previous post, food waste has a huge environmental impact. Restaurants can combat this by not throwing away leftovers at the end of the day. Instead, they donate them or become a Conscious Partner: they can sell all the meals they have prepared for the day at a reduced price and they do not produce any waste [15, 16].

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