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QSRs go green

By [Richard A. Webster](#) contributing wr
25 Mar 2008

“Paper or plastic?”

That question was the first taste many consumers had of the environmental movement in the United States. Customers pondered whether to choose the eco-friendly paper bag or the potentially harmful plastic bag.

Now, however, the consumer is asking the questions and the restaurant industry has taken notice.

“People want to know where their food comes from, what you are doing about being responsible to the environment and how you are minimizing the negative impact you’re having on the community,” said Jack Graves, chief culture officer for Holland Inc., which owns Burgerville, a 39-store chain in Oregon and Washington.

More and more restaurants are “going green” to meet public demand. In a 2007 study conducted by Restaurants & Institutions Magazine, 87.4 percent of consumers said it was very or somewhat important that restaurants have taken steps to improve recycling or food and paper waste. More than 85 percent said it was important that restaurants implement design changes to conserve energy and gas and oil consumption.

Aaron Allen, founder and CEO of Quantified Marketing, says that restaurants that implement eco-friendly policies can improve their public image and attract new customers who look for socially aware companies to patronize.

“The overarching trend for 2008 is consciousness,” he says. “It’s becoming very important to the restaurant industry.”

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because people are becoming very aware about what they're putting into their bodies and what type of corporate citizen the business is."

Brian Darr, managing director of Datassential Research Chicago, said small, independent chains are leading the eco-friendly charge because they have more flexibility than the national and international chains.

"If McDonald's or Burger King or Wendy's decided to switch (non-recycled) takeout containers for something recyclable, there may not be enough supply in the marketplace for them," he said. "They have to really sit it and look at it from a cost point of view. Are they going to put undue pressure on franchisees to comply with it?"

But Darr added that all the major players are looking at green tactics because it may help them lower costs in the long run.

U.S. playing catch-up

McDonald's already is experimenting with green-friendly initiatives overseas. In Switzerland the company installed dry urinals to cut water consumption, and in England it converts cooking oil into biofuel to operate delivery trucks.

For the most part, the U.S. restaurant industry is behind the green movement, playing catch-up with other parts of the world. "With rising energy costs for years, Darr said.

"Europe is certainly ahead of us so far as those types of initiatives. There it's a fact of life in your home and business, while here some energy-saving technology it makes news."

Burgerville's motto is "Serve with love." And the company's goal to fulfill that goal is by implementing environmentally friendly practices.

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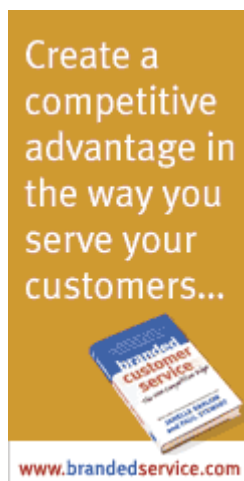
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Burgerville offsets its electricity use by purchasing 100-percent renewable power credits. It also instituted a recycling program in 2007 and a recycling and composting plan in 18 restaurants. The goal is to reduce food waste by 85 percent.

"People feel good about spending their dollars with us because they value in our product and that's what people appreciate, and things contribute and assist the communities where we operate our business to succeed, the communities we're in must be supported."

Burgerville buys its meat and produce from local farmers.



consumption by eliminating the need to ship in meat from
More importantly, Graves said, the chain is supporting :

"Family ranchers are disappearing across the country in doing what we can to turn this around, at least in our local area."
"And our guests see and understand this as being of value to the community we live in. We have family ranches where the young people can see the future and the way I earn my living. I can see the future of this ranch."

Helping the bottom line

Going green isn't just about saving the environment. Leanne, a franchise officer for Subway Restaurants, said the motivating factor for eco-friendly initiatives is the bottom line.

"We're always trying to be more efficient and cut back on costs," Leanne said. "We looked at things our franchisees could do that would save money and increase profitability, and that's what our Eco-Store is all about. In a green environment at the same time, that's even better."

Subway opened its first Eco-Store on Nov. 5, 2007 in Kentucky. It has since opened two more in Louisiana and Oregon. The stores incorporate energy-efficient systems, remote condensing units for refrigeration and lighting and controls for high efficiency lighting, LED interior lighting, low flow water fixtures and building materials made from sustainable materials.

"We always have to consider what's most cost-effective. The lower the cost, the more profit they're bringing in," Leanne said. "Equipment may be a little more expensive at first, but it's more cost-effective. We're not doing it for our image."

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