

## Words from the Wise

### EATING YOUR GREENS

There's a well-known saying among computer geeks when it comes to programming: "Garbage in, garbage out." That's also true when it comes to planning banquet menus for "green" events. Making better choices during the planning stages will pay big dividends when you get on site. Here are some things to take into account when planning a green menu.



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According to New American Dream (a non-profit organization dedicated to helping Americans consume responsibly), shade-grown coffee is better for the soil and produces better tasting beans. Organic coffee frees workers (and drinkers!) from the dangers of chemicals. Finally, fair-trade guarantees stable, fair prices so that farmers avoid the fluctuating world-market prices.

Serve your coffee in mugs or cups and saucers to prevent the additional waste from paper or Styrofoam cups. We know that Styrofoam is evil but you may ask why are paper cups so bad? Keep in mind that most are made from virgin trees and the goal is to not cut down a tree in the first place in order to make a product. There are many products out there these days that are made from non-paper alternatives that are also compostable. Remember, one of our goals is to reduce the amount of waste that actually goes to the landfills.

Why are organic and vegetarian options green? Organic foods use no pesticides or chemical fertilizers, so they are less harmful to the environment, the laborers in the fields and you! Vegetarian options are better because it takes 2,500 gallons of water to produce one pound of meat, but only 25 gallons of water to produce one pound of wheat. Furthermore, according the book *The Virtuous Consumer*, compared to pasta, producing red meat uses 20 times the land, causes seven times the water pollution and water use, and creates three times the greenhouse gas emissions.

According to Iowa State University, food travels an average of 1,600 miles from the farm to your plate. Locally grown food is the better option because it is fresher since it doesn't have to travel a long distance to get to you. Furthermore, since it travels a shorter distance, you have lower carbon emissions. Local farms = less shipping = less impact on the environment because you are reducing energy use and the pollution associated with transporting it. It is better to purchase from local farmers who traditionally grow a variety of foods versus large, corporate farms that exclusively grow one crop, which usually requires heavy herbicides and pesticides. And ultimately what organization doesn't want to support the local economy where it holds its meetings? When a group supports a locally owned business, money stays in the community.

As a final act of socially responsible menu-planning look into composting trash and donating leftovers. This reduces the amount of waste that goes to the landfill and makes better soil while all food shelters appreciate any donation of usable food.

Lastly, here are some green options that you can discuss with your venue's caterer or your hotel's catering director:

- Fair-trade, organic, and/or shade grown coffee served in mugs or cups and saucers instead of disposable paper or Styrofoam containers.
- Compostable versions of disposables (if they must be used).
- Honor bars stocked with organic snacks, coffees, and teas.
- Organic and vegetarian meal options.
- Free range eggs, chicken, and other meats.
- Produce purchased from local vendors whenever possible.
- Locally brewed beer and organic wines.
- Food scraps composted and sent to a local farm.
- Usable leftover food donated to a shelter or food bank.