

# GOING GREEN

## So You Want to Be Green: What Does That Mean?

January 2008 Foodservice Webinar featuring:  
Scot Case, VP of Tera Choice Environmental Marketing  
Holly Freshat, Sustainable Food Specialist for Cultivate Health, LLC  
Diane Imrie, MBA, RD, Director of Nutrition Services  
Sponsored by: ASHFSA, HFN and MINS

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"Going green" is a slogan most Americans can relate to. This webinar identified ways the food service industry can move in a "green direction" and featured three speakers each with varying concentrations with regards to "going green" in the foodservice industry. "Going green", a far reaching concept that involves all aspects of daily life, includes encouraging the use of sustainable and environmental aware policy, and increasing the use and purchase of these "green" products.

There is significant national attention related to going green. According to Scot Case, the first speaker, approximately 75% of industries expect to "green" their industry within the next two years. Every choice that is made, whether it is a purchase, procedure, or distribution of goods, is linked to the environment. A foodservice manager can green their operation in all of these areas through written policies, labels and education, cooperative efforts, vendor outreach, employee training, and simply looking at what other similar organizations are doing.

All speakers noted the importance and strength of the consumer dollar in effecting change. Industry change does not occur until there is enough customer demand for change. Financial incentives for change are as effective as the consumer. With the advent of "greening", false or misleading claims made related to "greening" are now termed "green washing". Companies may "spin the truth" on claims, provide no proof, display vague claims and make irrelevant claims e.g. by advertising "CFC-free"—a situation that can not exist. To prevent green washing, business managers should ensure the quality of the products through validation and verification of standards and standard setting processes.

"Greening" the food industry involves all facets of growing, distributing, processing, retailing, preparing, and selling food.

**Growing:** Current industrial farming practice focus on yield enhancing methods of agriculture including use of large amounts of antibiotics which can cause antibiotic resistance, a particular concern in health care. Yet as crop yield increases nutrient density of food decreases. Industrial farms contribute to water pollution. Specific recommended changes: • purchase organically • increase the use/purchasing of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and other nutrient dense foods • identify research farms that practice "green" animal raising (including free range, rBST free, and animals fed natural foods) • purchase fair-trade and shade grown coffee (minimizes use of chemicals and environmental damage).

**Distributing:** The more miles food travels the larger amount of CO<sub>2</sub> it generates. Awareness of where the food is coming from as well as the amount of cultivation is crucial for greening a facility

Recommended changes: • develop seasonal menus based on local climate • buy local • set up a farmers market at the hospital to encourage employee use through employee discounts • promote on-site farms or "healing gardens" with herbs or other products • market local farmers and produce by sponsoring "local grower's lunch" featuring locally grown produce • join a CSA (community sponsored agriculture). **Food Processing:** A significant amount of energy is used in the processing industry. Processing includes the transport of all ingredients to the plant, the development of the product and then the transport of the final product throughout the country. Food processing often eliminates essential nutrients and is often an unnecessary "middle step." Recommended changes: • purchase whole foods that are not processed • restrict the amount of processed trans fat in a facility • decrease the amount of packaging used in purchased/received food. **Marketing Trends/Retailing:** It is important to market the use of "green" products. Consumer education regarding the benefit of change and what is entailed in change is crucial. This will encourage increased use of the green products. Recommended changes: • share a letter of intent to go "green" with consumers and distributors • join local networks that encourage fresh and "green" policies • market changes on a website and as hard copies • advertise food as local or wherever it is from. **Food Preparation:** Food waste, created in food preparation/processing, creates an energy drain as well as increase in landfill sites. Composting is an alternative which decreases landfill and may represent a savings for organizations. Recommended changes: • utilize accurate prediction methods to decrease overproduction of food • initiate room service instead of buffet style in hospitals as it is proven more effective in decreasing waste • develop composting procedures for any waste-purchase packaging that can also be composted. **Selling:** The primary opportunity to educate consumers is in the selling of products. The distribution and displaying of products is a key component of staying green in the selling of products. Recommended changes: • make "green" foods cheaper and processed foods more expensive • purchase equipment and design kitchen to decrease energy use • advertise where the food came from and the practices that made it "green".

The methods of achieving a "green" food industry are far reaching and improvement in any area of food service is a positive step. Speakers emphasized to maintain a long-lasting focus on change, to make the Healthy Food Pledge as well as increase written policies into the institutions protocol. Our future environment depends on us thinking about it and doing something today.