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CONSERVE PROGRAM SPONSOR

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Today, more than ever, environmental consciousness is important to restaurateurs and their guests. Through an increasing awareness and implementation of sustainability practices, the restaurant industry is operating more efficiently, conserving more natural resources and helping improve the environment for everyone we serve.

The National Restaurant Association knows sustainability is here to stay and we are proud to lead the effort to make restaurants more environmentally friendly. Through our Conserve program, we are working diligently to educate restaurateurs and encourage them to take action. Giving operators the tools they need to be more sustainable is the key to long-term success.

During the past year, we've collaborated with several organizations to help reduce the amount of water and energy we use, as well as reduce the food waste we produce. We've already made great strides, but know there is more to be done.

This report not only reflects some of the progress we've made, but also provides an insight into our future plans as we continue our important work.

We hope it inspires you to make some of your own changes – at work and at home.

Dawn Sweeney
President and CEO
National Restaurant Association
Sustainability has become a fact of life and business, and the restaurant industry has gotten the message. Environmentally responsible restaurants are more popular with consumers as they choose where to dine, according to National Restaurant Association research. The Association’s 2015 Restaurant Industry Forecast reports that 46 percent of all consumers said they would dine at a restaurant offering sustainable or organic food. More than half of respondents ages 18 to 24 said they look to frequent restaurants that practice sustainability.

Restaurateurs recognize that customers not only want to know what businesses are doing to be more sustainable, but are interested in supporting businesses that align with their personal values.

As sustainability issues become more important to guests, restaurateurs are looking for ways to reduce waste while saving money and natural resources. Operators are embracing more efficient, environmentally stable business models. They’re stepping up to reduce and recycle waste, cut down on water and energy use, and offer more sustainable items on their menus.

Jeff Clark, program director for the National Restaurant Association’s Conserve program, says restaurateurs who get involved in sustainability will see a payoff.

“Sustainability may take more time and effort, but ultimately it’s about using resources efficiently. Businesses that squeeze the most out of what they use, whether it is electricity, water or food, can cut costs and run smarter, more effective businesses. They’re better able to attract guests and retain employees, particularly among millennials and younger workers.”

The restaurant industry’s interest in sustainability shows no sign of slowing down. In addition to ranking sustainability as a top menu trend for 2015, more than four in 10 professional chefs surveyed for the National Restaurant Association’s “What’s Hot” report predicted environmental sustainability would be the hottest menu trend 10 years from now.

The National Restaurant Association is continuing to ramp up its Conserve program to help the industry adopt more sustainable practices.

“Sustainability may take more time and effort, but ultimately it’s about using resources efficiently.”
— Jeff Clark
Among the Conserve program’s highlights in 2014:

- **New web resources**: The NRA in June introduced Restaurant.org/Conserve to offer information about environmentally friendly business practices that save money and protect the environment. Blog posts featuring “how-to” information, videos, case studies and best practices detail how restaurants can reduce energy and water use, decrease food and other waste, and operate their businesses in environmentally and economically responsible ways.

  George McKerrow Jr. of Ted’s Montana Grill, Clarice Turner of Starbucks and Dan Simons of Founding Farmers restaurants, as well as celebrity chefs Rick Bayless, Amanda Freitag and Gale Gand, are some of the experts who’ve shared their own experiences on the website.

  “By sharing tips, tools, expert advice and industry case studies, Conserve is able to give restaurateurs standard operating procedures they can use at their operations to enhance sustainability,” Clark says.

- **Newsletter**: The NRA in 2014 launched “Bright Ideas,” a monthly newsletter to help operators not just embrace sustainability, but better understand the financial and environmental impacts it has on their businesses and communities.

- **Research**: The NRA worked with Duke University’s Sanford School of Public Policy to determine how restaurateurs in Durham, N.C., could divert material from landfills and reduce the amount of food waste produced locally. The study was released in July.

- **Spreading the word**: In April, the NRA and Conserve joined real-estate developer Trammel Crow at Earth Day Texas, a two-day event attended by nearly 60,000 people. In addition, Clark and NRA sustainability director Laura Abshire spoke at several sustainability events, including the U.S. Zero Waste Business Council annual conference and the University of Pennsylvania’s “Last Food Mile” summit. The Association also immersed itself in a program called Share the Gulf, a coalition of chefs, restaurateurs, restaurant associations, seafood suppliers, fishermen, consumers and conservationists that worked to protect access to fish in the Gulf states.

- **Expert advice**: In July, the NRA issued its second Spotlight on Sustainability report featuring tips and advice from industry experts appearing at eight sustainability-related education sessions during NRA Show 2014. The report details easy steps restaurateurs can take to be more environmentally friendly. Topics included how to source local ingredients, become more energy efficient, and compost organic materials.

**CONSERVE’S CLARK: ‘WE’RE MAKING PROGRESS’**

*What are some of Conserve’s big achievements in the last year?*

We are partnering with other sustainability-focused organizations to develop educational materials and toolkits to help our industry become more environmentally responsible. For example, we work closely with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Energy Star program to ensure our members have the latest and best information on energy-efficient equipment. We’re focusing on helping restaurateurs reduce food waste through our efforts with the **Food Waste Reduction Alliance**.

The amount of food waste that is sent to landfills is a huge environmental problem. We’re trying to find ways we can alleviate it, whether through recycling, composting or food donation. We are also working with the Foodservice Packaging Institute and U.S. Composting Council to provide toolkits for restaurateurs about recycling and how to compost packaging.

*Where do you see the biggest challenges regarding sustainability?*

The restaurant industry faces a number of challenges. For one thing, there isn’t a strong recycling and composting infrastructure throughout the United States. There aren’t enough facilities to accept waste material for recycling and composting. That makes it difficult for operators to do either. Also, restaurants use a lot of water and energy, perhaps five to seven times more per square foot than other commercial businesses. Last, owners, managers and chefs are busy and often don’t have a lot of time to devote to sustainability projects. But even with those challenges, we’re working to help restaurateurs take simple steps that will cut costs and save resources. The fact is a lot more businesses are practicing sustainability. We think we’re making good progress.
• **Tracking progress:** In September, the NRA unveiled a new research report, “Gauging the Restaurant Industry’s Interest in Sustainability.” About three quarters of 1,000 fullservice and quickservice operators surveyed for the report said they recycled used fryer oil, fats and grease. More than six in 10 recycled their cardboard and paper, used compact fluorescent lighting or bought products made of recycled materials. About three in 10 installed faucet aerators to conserve water.

• **Going local:** The Association launched a new version of the Zero Waste Zones program in Atlanta in mid-November. The program, run in partnership with the Georgia Restaurant Association, aims to educate Atlanta restaurateurs about recovering and recycling food waste and other materials, and reducing water and energy use. The kickoff, held Veterans Day, highlighted the work of two pioneer members — caterer Affairs to Remember, which has diverted 1 million pounds of recoverable material away from landfills, and the Georgia World Congress Center, which recently achieved Silver LEED certification status from the U.S. Green Building Council. Environmentalist Laura Turner Seydel, chair of the Captain Planet Foundation, attended the event, along with Karen Bremer, executive director of the GRA and an NRA board member, and Jon D. Johnston of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

### CONSERVE PARTNERSHIPS

In 2014, the National Restaurant Association’s Conserve program formed partnerships to help forward its mission of engaging the restaurant industry in the practice of sustainability. Here is a rundown of those partnerships:

**LEANPATH**, manufacturer of an automated food-waste tracking system used in commercial kitchens, helps restaurateurs and other hospitality businesses reduce pre-consumer food waste, which has a positive impact on the environment and profitability. NRA members get a 10 percent discount on LeanPath’s Zap program. The company says restaurateurs who track and reduce food waste can cut food costs between 2 percent and 6 percent.

**DOW AGROSCIENCES** teamed up with Conserve to tell restaurateurs about the benefits of high-stability oils, like Omega 9. The company says Omega 9’s extended fry life reduces back-of-the-house oil waste by allowing chefs to cook 50 percent more food per gallon.

**EXCEL DRYER INC.** and the NRA have partnered to help educate restaurateurs about conserving energy and reducing waste through energy- and cost-efficient product upgrades, such as high-speed, energy-efficient hand dryers. Conserve shares success stories associated with energy-efficient hand dryers. The dryer, manufactured by Excel, uses patented technology to dry hands three times faster and uses 80 percent less energy than conventional dryers.

**NATUREWORKS LLC**, a manufacturer of bioplastics derived entirely from plant resources, has partnered with Conserve to introduce restaurateurs and foodservice operators to environmentally friendly packaging products.

**FISHER NICKEL INC.** is the leader in energy research and sustainability for the commercial foodservice industry. Fisher Nickel’s expert consultants provide integrated solutions through new technologies, improved equipment design and operational innovation.
Focus on food waste

The NRA made food-waste reduction a central issue in 2014 and the initiative remains a top priority in 2015.

Laura Abshire, the NRA’s director of sustainability policy and government affairs, co-chairs the Food Waste Reduction Alliance, a collaboration of the NRA, Grocery Manufacturers Association and Food Marketing Institute that began in 2011. She’s focused on making the business case to show restaurateurs how they can save money on food costs and appeal to environmentally conscious customers at the same time.

“Reducing food waste doesn’t have to be difficult or expensive,” Abshire says. “Businesses that divert material from the waste stream and donate their unused food make a positive impact — financially, socially and environmentally.” The FWRA released research in November documenting the food industry’s successes and challenges in reducing commercial food waste. Abshire and the NRA played an active role in publicizing the report’s findings and sharing the data with Association members, the media and lawmakers.

The National Restaurant Association’s “What’s Hot” survey of 1,300 professional chef-members of the American Culinary Federation also found that reducing food waste is a center-of-the-plate issue for operators — and not just because it’s good for the environment. Chefs listed food-waste reduction and management among their top 10 food trends for 2015.

“More chefs and restaurateurs are realizing the cost savings of reducing food waste,” said Annika Stensson, the NRA’s director of research communications. “Food prices rose more than 5 percent in 2014 alone. Minimizing waste and maximizing ingredient yield is top of mind for the industry.” As 2015 unfolds, the NRA is making the issue of commercial food waste a priority and will educate its members on how to reduce food waste. The Association has teamed up with LeanPath, which has created a food-waste prevention program for foodservice operators. The company says about 4 percent to 10 percent of food purchased by operators is thrown out before it is plated, and hopes the partnership will give restaurateurs new tools to cut waste at the source.

ABSHIRE DISCUSSES CONSERVE AND FWRA GOALS

Why did the NRA start the Conserve program?
We wanted to give restaurateurs tools to become more sustainable businesses. There wasn’t a lot of restaurant-focused material available before we started Conserve in 2009. We believe that educating operators makes a big difference. Today Conserve is open to everyone, not just NRA members. Knowledge is power. With the information we’ve helped provide, operators can implement their own responsible programs and cut costs while protecting the environment.

How different is Conserve today than it was five years ago?
Originally our program focused on energy and water conservation and some packaging issues. Food waste was just a small part of it. But now we’re emphasizing food-waste reduction as a key issue in 2015. We also have an advisory council made up of representatives from leading restaurant companies. They continue to guide the program and help us make strategic decisions. We’re taking cues from them to figure out how we can help other brands practice sustainability.

What’s the result of the NRA’s work with the FWRA?
We joined the Food Waste Reduction Alliance in 2011, an industry partnership to help reduce, reuse and recycle food waste. Since its inception, the FWRA has moved the food industry forward by raising awareness, sharing best practices and creating a food-waste toolkit to help our members tackle this important issue.

What’s one of the biggest lessons learned from participating in the FWRA?
Whether the challenges and barriers are perceived or real, some manufacturers, retailers and restaurateurs think it’s hard to reduce food waste. We need to overcome that. Each part of the commercial food chain must train staff better, build better infrastructure, and elevate this to a top-level issue.

“Businesses that divert material from the waste stream and donate their food make a positive impact.”
— Laura Abshire

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