

National Restaurant Association Launches Conserve Initiative to Educate and Inspire Restaurants to 'Go Green'

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Web site to feature educational resources and tools, tips and success stories to increase environmental efforts in the restaurant industry

The National Restaurant Association today is launching "Conserve: Solutions for Sustainability," an initiative designed to support the nation's nearly one million restaurant and foodservice locations as they become more eco-friendly, at the Association's annual Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show in Chicago. The \$558 billion restaurant industry is committed to finding solutions to lessen its environmental impact while maintaining economic vitality. The Conserve Web site will educate restaurateurs on how taking small steps over time - or bigger steps for those who choose to do so - can make a difference for the future of our planet, as well as be positive for business.

"We are launching Conserve to raise awareness and provide resources and information about eco-friendly practices to the entire restaurant and foodservice community," said Dawn Sweeney, President and CEO of the National Restaurant Association. "We believe this initiative will prove to be a great step toward an environmentally sound future while preserving the vitality of our industry."

The Web site, conserve.restaurant.org, will serve as one of the initiative's primary resources for helping restaurateurs move toward sustainable or "green" operations. In addition to providing tips and resources, the site will feature stories from several restaurants that have successfully implemented environmentally friendly practices. As restaurants develop new methods of decreasing their environmental footprint, new case studies will be added to provide insight into best practices and lessons learned through the process of going "green." Initially focused on energy, water and construction, the site will grow over time to include other aspects of sustainability, including recycling, packaging, cleaning supplies and food and beverages.

"The National Restaurant Association represents more than 380,000 member locations, and no two of them are alike," said Niki Leondakis, COO of Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants and chairman of the National Restaurant Association's Green Task Force.

"All restaurants, no matter how large or small - from big corporations with thousands of franchised locations to small, independent neighborhood eateries - can do their part, at the pace they can sustain, to reduce our industry's impact on the environment and conserve resources for future generations," said Leondakis.

Many restaurants and foodservice operations are already underway in their environmental planning. In fact, nearly one-third of restaurants say they are allocating a larger percentage of their budget toward "green" initiatives this year, according to Association research, and the second hottest trend in kitchen equipment is environmental friendliness. More than half of restaurants have also updated heating, air conditioning and refrigeration systems over the past two years in order to conserve water and energy.

Since not all restaurants can commit financial resources to environmentally friendly upgrades, the Association aims to provide tools and resources through the Conserve Web site on ways to "go green" at little or no cost. Some steps are simple, such as turning off lights, unplugging equipment not in use, and running only fully loaded racks of dishes through dishwashers. Regardless of the size and number of locations, all restaurants can implement some no-cost or low-cost practices that will reduce their environmental impact, conserve natural resources, and potentially decrease energy and water consumption expenses.

The Web site also features success stories of eco-friendly practices or products that involve an initial investment, but ultimately pay for themselves in savings from energy and water efficiency. Some examples of these practices include installing low-flow valves for pre-rinse sprayers, low gallons per flush toilets, energy efficient refrigerators and other appliances, and replacing incandescent with fluorescent lighting.

One of the large chains experiencing early success, particularly with eco-friendly construction practices, is [HYPERLINK "http://www.subway.com/subwayroot/index.aspx"](http://www.subway.com/subwayroot/index.aspx) Subway Restaurants. Subway opened several "Eco Stores," beginning in 2007 in Kissimmee, Fla., and plans are underway for additional Eco Stores, which are constructed using green practices to make them energy efficient. Subway worked closely with the U.S. Green Building Council to follow their Leadership in Energy Efficiency and Environmental Design (LEED) certification requirements in order to build stores that conserve both energy and water.

"We have more locations than any other restaurant chain in the United States, and more than 29,200 Subway stores worldwide," said Tom Coba, Subway's Chief Operations Officer. "As a leader in the industry, Subway is constantly developing methods for each of our locations, not just our Eco Stores, to conserve resources, including switching to napkins made of 100 percent recycled materials, which will save 140,000 trees a year, and redesigning our shipping packaging, which will eliminate over 97,000 pounds of plastic annually."

Sheboygan, Wis.-based [HYPERLINK "http://www.foodspot.com/nonnamaria/"](http://www.foodspot.com/nonnamaria/) Osteria Nonna Maria, a single location restaurant serving pizza and Italian cuisine, has reduced its water consumption by half and reduced their energy bill through investing in two "tankless," on-demand water heaters. Housed in a 1800s-era building, Nonna Maria wanted to replace its existing water system.

By switching to an on-demand system that can heat local water supply from 38 degrees to 185 in a matter of minutes, the restaurant saves water and energy by heating only the water required for a specific purpose, rather than heating all of the water in a tank. The restaurant also made additional system upgrades for water consumption, including installation of low-flush toilets and low-pressure faucets in the kitchen sinks.

"When we had the opportunity to upgrade our systems, we wanted to do our part to be environmentally friendly," said Mary Jo Beniger, owner of Osteria Nonna Maria. "We quickly found that in addition to helping the environment, our water consumption was reduced by up to 50 percent. The money we spent on the new systems was great for our business, and the systems are paying for themselves through our utility savings."

Partial funding to launch the Conserve initiative was supplied through a grant from the Turner Foundation. The Turner Foundation, dedicated to creating solutions for sustainable living, is a founding partner of the initiative.

"The National Restaurant Association and our members are concerned about the environmental impact of our industry," adds Sweeney. "We look forward to helping the industry become more focused on sustainability through the Conserve initiative."

The National Restaurant Association, founded in 1919, is the leading business association for the restaurant industry, which is comprised of 945,000 restaurant and foodservice outlets and a work force of 13.1 million employees - making it the cornerstone of the economy, career opportunities and community involvement. Along with the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, the Association works to represent, educate and promote the rapidly growing industry.

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