

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT Third-party Certification Insures Against Greenwashing

In March, we published results of a survey on the “greening” of distribution. Two-thirds of distributors said they have formal green initiatives. Another 71% of those who did not yet have initiatives said they would have them in the next 12 months. From various reports, it seems as though the green movement among distributors has ramped up considerably since March. One example is Food Services of America (FSA). Its Woodburn, Ore., facility has been certified for sustainable business practices. This means they have safe and fair labor conditions, resource conservation and waste management.

FSA is the first broadliner to be certified. The certifying body is Food Alliance, described as a nonprofit that has the “most comprehensive certification in North America for sustainable agricultural and food handling practices.” The list of issues that the facility was judged on is pretty impressive:

- Traceability of Food Alliance Certified products;
- Provision of safe and fair working conditions;
- Reduction of toxic and hazardous materials;
- Conservation of energy;
- Conservation of water;
- Reduction of waste with reuse and recycling;
- Quality control and food safety; and
- Continuous improvement of practices.

So, why the need for a third-party audit? Randy Irvine, Woodburn president, was quoted in a press release as saying, “With the corporate scandals of the last few years – and with greenwashing – people have become really skeptical. If a company is going to make sustainability claims, I think

those claims should be independently verified and substantiated. I’m proud that Food Services of America is showing leadership in this area.”

It’s unfortunate that green initiatives need certification but the fact is that, due to foodborne illness outbreaks and media coverage of a number of problematic ingredients like trans fats, public trust in the food supply has been compromised. Anything that distributors can do to reestablish that trust through forward-thinking positive action is good.

Evidently the decision to seek certification started with a program that many other distributors have undertaken: to offer customers more local and sustainable products. Irvine says customer response to Food Alliance Certified products was positive so the company expanded its sustainable product line and investigated the advantages of certification. At the same time, management has been taking a comprehensive approach to reducing the company’s environmental footprint through energy conservation in warehousing and transportation.

I assume that FSA is planning to have its additional eight op cos certified by Food Alliance. It sounds like a long, thorough process. According to the Web site – [www.foodalliance.org](http://www.foodalliance.org) – products and processes are exhaustively investigated. Products are checked for all ingredients and production and processes range from water management to receiving, storing and shipping to pest management. An application can be downloaded from the site. Becoming certified for sustainability would take an investment of time and money, but the annual process is an excellent marketing vehicle for customer relationships and sets a standard of leadership.



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