



Leading Local

Burgerville is locally sourcing its pumpkins this fall and ahead of the industry in its push for local supply chains.

By [Jordan Melnick](#)

A common concern in restaurants is that sustainability is too expensive. But Dennis says that is “absolutely not” the case, especially when considering hidden costs.

“The true costs to ... businesses and communities in cheap food, in ingredients that we can’t trust to be safe or healthy to eat, where we don’t understand where they come from—the true cost of perpetuating a food system like that,” Dennis says, “I don’t even think we’ve begun to quantify.”

Burgerville’s “farm-to-cup” initiative sets a small but significant example for responsible restaurant management.



“It can seem really simple, you know, just one ingredient like pumpkin in a milkshake,” she says. “But I really see it’s going to be real live examples like that ... that will serve as the model for all of the foodservice industry really figuring out how to bring sustainable food production to scale.”

For restaurants, sustainable business has become less a choice than an imperative, according to Scott Exo, Food Alliance’s executive director.

“I think that the days in which a quick-serve restaurant can distinguish itself by the things it does within its four walls are gone,” he says.

The seasons bring change and this fall Burgerville, with 39 locations in Oregon and Washington state, changed how it sources the central ingredient for its pumpkin smoothies and milkshakes.

The pumpkins come from a farm less than two hours from Burgerville’s Vancouver, Washington, headquarters. They are processed, seasoned, and packaged about an hour away in Salem, Oregon.

Both the farm and processing plant have Food Alliance certification. A nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon, Food Alliance certifies every link of the restaurant supply chain—farms, ranches, food processors, distributors—for sustainable agriculture and production practices.

Burgerville is promoting this year's "farm-to-cup" pumpkin smoothies and milkshakes as proof of its commitment to sustainable business.

"For the first time we have a continuity of sustainable stewardship showing up at each link in the supply chain," says Alison Dennis, who manages Burgerville's supply chain.

"They're increasingly expected by their customers and by the industry generally to look downward through their supply chain and begin to take responsibility for what happens before products reach their actual business."

In terms of sustainability, the Pacific Northwest is ahead of the rest of the country, Exo says.

Oregon-based restaurateur Richard Satnick agrees.

"In Portland and the Northwest, boy, you say 'local' and folks pay attention fast," says Satnick, founder of the Laughing Planet Café and a member of the Food Alliance's business advisory board.

There are seven Laughing Planets in Oregon and one in Bloomington, Indiana. Adapting sustainable business practices has been far easier out west, Satnick says.

"I think that the days in which a quick-serve restaurant can distinguish itself by the things it does within its four walls are gone."

"Having been in business in several other cities, it strikes me as unique," he says.

Satnick credits the region's natural beauty and farming culture with making the Northwest a good place for environmentally responsible restaurants. But in the end, he isn't sure exactly why sustainability has caught on so well with locals.

"Maybe it's the beer," he says.

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