



The Positive Effects of Sustainability in Agriculture

Photos courtesy of Truitt Bros.

K. Susan Appleby, SEDCOR

Driving by the Truitt Bros. plant in Salem, truckloads of green beans are being delivered from local farms. These green beans are processed within hours of being harvested, which can actually be “fresher” than the fresh green beans available in produce departments at local grocery stores. This is just a small part of the Truitt Bros. story.

Peter and David Truitt grew up immersed in the cannery business as young boys raised in rural Louisiana. In 1973, they purchased the cannery operation in Salem, bringing with them a family heritage of food processing and ushered in an era of cooperation, innovation and teamwork. Putting out a quality product became paramount and a determining factor for every decision made regarding the operation. By the end of the 1970s, the entire cannery had been reconfigured. The process was streamlined when the entire line was gutted and automated in the early 1980s. In addition to the physical changes taking place, the less tangible shifts were just as potent, such as a whole new attitude at the cannery.

The Truitt Brothers established good working relationships with their bean growers and customers. A plan was created to pay the grower a percentage of the harvest up front. After determining a fair market price for both, they would pay the grower a balance in the spring. This arrangement shielded both grower and the Truitts from the volatility of the market.



Peter and David Truitt.

In more recent days, opportunity with the emerging sustainable food movement had customers calling for healthier food. Sustainability fell neatly in line with Truitt’s values – quality products grown by farmers committed to stewardship of their land. The sustainable food

movement led to their certification with the Food Alliance and a Truitt Brothers branded line. This broadened the Truitt’s horizons and breathed new life into the company. With the development of their own brand, and new products lines, the company felt the stabilizing effects of diversification. And, they are enjoying the feeling of hard won success.



Participants of the 2009 Northwest Sustainability Discovery Tour heard from restaurant owners at the EcoTrust Building.

Truitt Bros., located in the Willamette Valley, the premier growing region of the United States, understands what fresh, great-tasting food is all about. The company provides canned and customized shelf-stable foods to a variety of establishments, from restaurants and schools to healthcare institutions, contractors and retailers. Truitt Bros. products include soup and meal components, entrees, as well as pumpkins, pears, apples, cherries, plums and green beans. These Pacific Northwest products are recognized by consumers across the nation as the best available.

To Truitt Bros., integrity in agriculture, means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It’s producing natural food that is healthful and environmentally friendly, as well as:

- Doing work in a responsible way — treating employees well and providing a safe work environment.
- Carefully managing waste with an emphasis on recycling and reuse using energy resources prudently and consistently striving to improve these methods.
- Taking care of employees and the community while also looking out for the environment.

Companies that let social issues slide, end up losing money, either in high turnover or possibly lawsuits over unfair labor practices. Their approach to the social equity aspect of sustainability is for management to know each employee by name and to ensure the work environment is based on mutual respect.

Through their commitment to concerns such as water and energy conservation, recycling and waste reduction, and the provision of safe working conditions — Truitt Bros. was the first food processor to be certified by the Food Alliance in the nation. The certification is rigorous and voluntary, and is based on socially and environmentally responsible practices for both the farm and the processor. It is widely considered the most comprehensive third party certification for sustainable practices in North America.

Green Beans

The Willamette Valley has one of the best farming climates in the country and Truitt takes advantage of this. Their blue lake green beans are grown just a few miles away from their Salem plant and their Bartlett pears are grown near Hood River. Studies have shown canned products are higher nutritionally than frozen or some fresh products that may sit for long periods in transit. Canned foods stands as the purest food packaging. Their foods are processed and stored using less energy than other methods such as freezing. When the useful life of the can has ended, it can be recycled.

Truitt Bros. had an independent research company compare how their product's carbon footprint fared against fresh and frozen varieties. The result? Fresh local sustainably grown green beans are best as long as they're in season. The rest of the year, Truitt's canned green beans turned out to be more responsible than they ever imagined. With all else being equal, canned green beans use up to 70% less energy than frozen on their trip from the farm to your table. Freezing consumes at least twice as much energy as the canning process and canned beans can be shipped and stored at any temperature, requiring no energy.

Support of Sustainable Oregon Agricultural Products

Truitt Bros. are leaders in bringing quality and innovation to the industry through their hosting of events and educational programs. From the restaurant industry, to farmers and food processors, sustainable can be used as a competitive edge. Sustainability to the Truitt Bros. is a family tradition across the food spectrum and industries. **Oregon in Chicago**, is held during the National Restaurant Association tradeshow to showcase their products and those from other sustainable businesses. They also host the **Farm to Fork** show in Washington, D.C., and the **Northwest Sustainability Discovery Tour** to illustrate actual practicing models for sustainable farms and business to restaurant owners, chefs and journalists.



Discussion on sustainable food and processes.

Oregon in Chicago

Sponsored by Truitt Brothers, Inc. and Sabroso® Company, the Third Annual Oregon in Chicago, was held in June. This event let visitors explore "**The New Oregon Trail**," through the distinctive flavors and products of Oregon's three primary growing regions: The Coast, The Gorge, and The Valley.

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Processing green beans at the Truitt facility.

Steps to Sustainability

Embracing sustainability starts with small steps and progresses through stages. Here are some key elements:

- **Set goals:** Identify your purpose, whether to cut costs or to be environmentally responsible.
- **Start small:** Look at reducing energy, starting with switching to CFL or LED lighting and progressing to purchasing energy-saving appliances.
- **Look upstream:** Find sustainable suppliers and sourcing. Know your environmental impact from all sources into your business.
- **Look downstream:** Examine your waste stream to reduce, reuse and recycle.
- **Save energy:** Realign procedures to maximize energy efficiency.
- **Build green:** Implement green building practices. Go further and seek LEED certification.
- **Invest in people:** Social equity is an essential component to sustainability.
- **Watch the bottom line:** Implementing sustainable practices that provide no ROI aren't practical or wise.
- **Learn more:** Join and support sustainable organizations, and attend their education events.
- **Get certified:** Invest in an LCA or seek an audit from a third-party certifier, if applicable.
- **Tell others:** Share your story with customers so they know not only where your products originate, but also why they should buy your product over others, especially if it costs more.



Northwest Sustainability Discovery Tour 2009

Truitt Bros. advances sustainability practices in foodservice by providing an educational forum with presentations from experts in the field, as well as visits to operations that are moving towards sustainable practices. As foodservice and restaurant operators continue to innovate, a collective of Oregon-based food leaders stepped up to offer the 2nd Annual Northwest Sustainability Discovery Tour. This 2-1/2 day symposium held in August, was designed to share first-hand experience and knowledge to build farm to fork supply chains between growers, processors and buyers.

“Oregon and the surrounding Northwest have numerous models of sustainable practices in place and it’s the best region in the country to observe actual practices that are working.” said **Peter Truitt**. “There’s a lot for the region to be proud of and this tour gives others a great opportunity to Discover effective and working models to take home, from the farm to the operator. Folks from all over the U. S. saw, heard and touched the best of what’s happening here. We look forward to next year when we’ll do it again, even better!”

About 80 participants heard from Northwest experts in morning educational sessions which were complemented by outings to local kitchens and restaurants, farms, food processors and beverage manufacturers. Challenges, opportunities, successful practices and advantages of sustainable food systems were shared. In addition to observing the infrastructure in place in Oregon to support sustainable food initiatives, the programs showed:

- How to build credibility through third-party certifications;
- Looked at food and its impact on the environment through life cycle assessments;
- How sustainable food systems have become a strategic focus of education at two of the state’s largest universities; and
- How government policy is poised to change foodservice operations for the betterment of the local economy and the environment.

Sustainability is more than the latest buzzword. In all segments of the foodservice industry, operators are embracing a systematic approach to this broad topic. Best practices go beyond following the latest trend to building a long-term business model based on principles that lead to economic success, build social equity and protect the environment. These methods are nothing new to the Truitt Bros. They have been committed to supporting local farms, reducing their carbon footprint and doing what is right for many years. Preservation of natural resources, as well as positive employee relations and sound manufacturing practices are all part of their commitment — which is a continuous process.

Truitt Bros. is truly a leader in sustainability.

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Full Sail Brewing was one of the stops on the Northwest Sustainability Discovery Tour.

The **Coast** inspired simple, yet flavorful creations such as pan-seared halibut with a rustic D’ Anjou pear and hazelnut pesto. From the **Columbia River Gorge**, guests enjoyed a wide range of recipes from smoothies made with the region’s best cherries and cranberries, to an apple endive and romaine salad. In the **Valley**, a selection of warming chili and chowder showcased grass-fed beef, vegetarian ingredients, and all-natural flavors. The event immersed operators in the casual sophistication and festive fare indigenous to the Northwest. It offered product solutions and menu ideas that could be easily achieved. Attendees are drawn to the event due to the positive perception of Oregon as a clean, fresh, unspoiled environment.

As consumer interest in sustainable products and services increases, foodservice operators find themselves looking for new ways to satisfy their customers’ appetite for better foods. The Oregon in Chicago reception focused on education and promotion to help make the environmentally responsible methods of sustainability more tangible for today’s menus. Truitt worked to develop the Oregon Culinary Trail around the Northwest Sustainability Discovery Tour. Oregon in Chicago was just the beginning of this journey.

Truitt Bros. Sustainability Initiatives

- Cannery certified by Food Alliance, May 2006
- Green beans and pears, first Food Alliance-certified products, launched Fall 2006
- Support of the nonprofit conservation organization Ecotrust’s pioneering Farms to Schools program, beginning Fall 2006
- Life Cycle Assessment, requested by Truitt Bros., published Summer 2007
- Annual Farm to Fork NACUFS (National Association of College & University Food Services), event sponsorship beginning Summer 2007
- Oregon in Chicago event at the annual National Restaurant Association Restaurant Hotel-Motel Show Sponsorship, beginning May 2007
- Food Alliance-certified pinto, garbanzo and black beans, launched Spring 2008
- Annual Northwest Sustainability Discovery Tour Sponsorship, beginning Summer 2008