



# Food Purchasing

Green Seal™ Guide for  
Restaurants and Food Services

*Based on GS-46, Green Seal's Standard for Restaurants and Food Services*

**The situation:** Over 95% of the environmental impact from the day-to-day operations of a food service business comes from the food purchased.

**The Change Maker:** An environmentally responsible food service operation considers the life-cycle impact of food when deciding what to serve.

➤ **Food has a big footprint:** Food production contributes between 17% and 32% of all global human-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.<sup>1</sup> However, GHG emissions are just one of many major environmental and ethical issues associated with food; others include water use, biodiversity, other forms of air, soil and water pollution, animal welfare, international development and food security. In the US, about 1.2 billion pounds of pesticides are used annually, which accounts for nearly 23% of the world's use.<sup>2</sup> Applying organic or integrated pest management production methods greatly reduces the impact on the environment. Animal products typically contribute the greatest impacts; for example a piece of steak has 200 times the Global Warming Potential (GWP) than a potato.<sup>3</sup> The livestock sector generates 65% of human-related nitrous oxide, which has 296 times the GWP of CO<sub>2</sub>. It also accounts for 37% of all human-induced methane (23 times the GWP as CO<sub>2</sub>), and 64% of ammonia, which contributes significantly to acid rain.<sup>4</sup> It is also estimated that 70% of antibiotics used in the US are fed to farm animals to artificially promote growth and counteract unhealthy living conditions.<sup>5</sup>

➤ **Mom was right, don't waste your food:** How much food you purchase also determines the operation's impact, so buying the right amount of food and reducing wasted food is important. Get creative with the food you have leftover—donate it, compost it, avoid sending it to the landfill. More on food waste can be found in the Green Seal Guide for Restaurants and Food Services: Waste Management.

➤ **Know the trip your food took, How – Where – When:** How: The type of transportation used to ship food makes a difference, with air travel often being the least efficient option, followed by trucks, train, and then boat (usually the most efficient option). Where: The total distance that food travels to reach your operation can be important, especially because the average distance traveled is 1,500 miles.<sup>6</sup> When: Food produced in season typically has a lesser impact. When vegetables are grown in an energy intensive greenhouse, their environmental impact can be as much as meat products.

ENVIRONMENTAL  
LEADERSHIP STANDARDS



CERTIFICATION FOR  
PRODUCTS, SERVICES,  
PROPERTIES & COMPANIES



PARTNERSHIPS IN  
GREEN PURCHASING &  
FACILITIES MANAGEMENT



SUSTAINABILITY  
RESEARCH & LIFE CYCLE  
ANALYSIS



**How to make a real difference:** According to the Green Seal Environmental Standard for Restaurants and Food Services, GS-46:

**1. Buy food from responsibly produced sources and aim to increase amounts purchased over time.**

- Responsibly produced sources are those certified by USDA Organic, Food Alliance, Rainforest Alliance, Protected Harvest, Marine Stewardship Council, Aquaculture Certification Council, Bird Friendly, and locally-grown options that meet the requirements of those certifications.
  - Start with the “low hanging fruit”, for example coffee. There are many responsibly produced coffee options available.
  - Avoid overfished seafood options, for example do not buy the red options and aim for the green choices on the following lists:
    - Monterey Bay Seafood Watch web list
      - [www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx](http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx)
    - Blue Ocean Institute’s Guide to Ocean Friendly Seafood web list
      - [www.blueocean.org/seafood/](http://www.blueocean.org/seafood/)
- Track Purchases. Keep a record of what you buy, when you buy it, and how much you spend on responsible food purchases to help you forecast, adjust, and increase over time. Check Green Seal’s web site for a spreadsheet to help you do this.

**2. Make it a priority to buy animal products more responsibly.**

- Use animal products that were produced without the use of non-therapeutic antibiotics. Ask your supplier for a letter to attest that their source meets this and get to know your farmer.
- Take this a step further and look for meat options from animals raised humanely and not confined. Look for Animal Welfare Approved, American Humane Certified, Certified Humane Raised and Handled, Food Alliance Certified.
- Find ways to reduce your red meat purchases. This can be done by replacing a menu item or using smaller portions.

**3. Start tracking the transport of your food. This is a big task, so make the products you buy most a first priority.**

- Your food’s mode of transport is important. Air travel is the least efficient option and can be avoided. For short distances, look for suppliers that use alternatively-fueled vehicles, fuel-efficient vehicles, or qualify as an EPA SmartWay Partner.
- The miles your food travels can be reduced. Look for locally-grown foods, preferably from within 100 miles. Check to see if that food obtained locally is also seasonal, avoiding energy-intensive greenhouse grown food.

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**Read the full standard at:**

[http://greenseal.org/certification/standards/gs46\\_restaurantfoodsvcs.cfm](http://greenseal.org/certification/standards/gs46_restaurantfoodsvcs.cfm)

<sup>1</sup> Bellarby, J. et al. 2008. Cool Farming: Climate Impacts of Agriculture and Mitigating Potential. Published by Greenpeace.

<sup>2</sup> EPA: The Value of Countries Working Together to Regulate Pesticides and Food Safety  
<http://www.epa.gov/oppfead1/international/2009/factsheet-working.pdf>. Accessed: May 11, 2008

<sup>3</sup> Mogensen et al. 2009. Life Cycle Assessment across the Food Supply Chain, Chapter 5 in Sustainability in the Food Industry Ed. C. Baldwin. Wiley-Blackwell, Ames, Iowa.

<sup>4</sup> Steinfeld et al 2006. Livestock’s Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options. Published by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.HTM> Accessed: May 11, 2008

<sup>5</sup> Worldwatch Institute. 2004. Good Stuff: A Behind-the-Scenes Guide to the Things We Buy. Last accessed 10-3-08.  
<http://www.worldwatch.org/system/files/GS0000.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Pirog et al. 2003. Checking the Food Odometer Leopold Center. [http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/files/food\\_travel072103.pdf](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/files/food_travel072103.pdf)