



**“AS A BUYER, YOU
HAVE THE POWER OF
THE CONSUMER.”**

SUSTAINABLE FOOD SOURCING

by **Olivia Imeson**
April 2021

In order to protect our environment, we need an emotional connection and a sense of agency with regards to the place we want to protect. Once you have taken the various steps towards improving the immediate vicinity in which you live and work, you can start to look further afield to make changes. Kitchens deliver food and the food they deliver is a good focal point. In order to protect the environment that is local to each of us, we need to support that area. By starting small and focusing on sourcing food from local markets, farms, allotments and traders, we are supporting local communities and reducing the carbon footprint of the various methods of transporting produce.

The majority of fruit and vegetables sold in the UK are imported from other parts of the world. During winter months, vegetables and fruit that suit a warmer climate are grown in greenhouses. By serving seasonal food, you will be supporting local businesses and the produce served will have been grown or raised in a nearby field with minimal artificial intervention. The following factors will show you the changes you can implement and why these steps are important.

BUYING SEASONAL, LOCAL FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

As mentioned above, Mediterranean vegetables and fruit require heated climates in the UK, such as greenhouses, which come with a higher carbon footprint. By sourcing local fruit and vegetables, you will engineer your menus based on the seasons and help any struggling local businesses while reducing CO2 emissions. Out-of-season food has to be refrigerated too, causing more energy to be spent in the process.

BUYING SEASONAL, LOCAL MEAT

Buying locally farmed meat is better for the farmers, kitchens and animals. Locally bred livestock tend to have a higher quality of life, living free-range and treated with care. By being mindful about where your meat has been sourced from, you are again supporting local businesses and setting an example to others in the industry.

‘CARBON COUNTING’ COULD BE THE NEW ‘CALORIE COUNTING’

In many restaurants and other establishments with a food offer, you may come across menus with a calorie count displayed for each dish. In more recent times, a new trend is ‘carbon counting’. This means that the consumer will be able to see the carbon footprint of the dishes they are considering. It is a great way to encourage eco-mindfulness and is a brilliant method to measure a restaurant’s level of ‘greenness’.

ECO-FRIENDLY PACKAGING.

A lot of our food is still provided to us in unnecessary packaging – usually made out of plastic or other harmful materials. Liaise with your providers to see what their sustainable options are or if the packaging is necessary at all. For example, some supermarkets are now providing re-fillable options where products can be decanted into re-useable receptacles. Other options include decomposable or dissolvable packets.

MENU ENGINEERING

Although buying local is a good way to help reduce your carbon footprint, the transportation of your produce is not the sole culprit for increased CO2 levels in the environment. There are many stages of food production to be held accountable. Due to the nature of how certain foods are produced, you will find that some have considerably higher carbon footprints than others. Animal products usually have a higher footprint than plant-based products. For example, chicken and pork footprints are lower than those of lamb and cheese but plant-based meals are lower still, with less than half the CO2-equivalence per kilogram. This is why menus with a good balance of plant and animal-based dishes are best and why veganism has become so popular – especially with Generation Z – the eco-warrior generation!

Again, mindfulness about the source of your products. Where was it grown? How was it grown? Has it been stored in an anti-eco-friendly way? And if it has, how long for? Is it organic? These are all questions to be asked. Remember to check your values and constantly refer back to them as a regular habit.

As a buyer, you have the power of the consumer. Support local and smaller businesses when you can. Opt for suppliers that tell you exactly where, how and by whom your products have been made. Transparency about the origin of products is essential when practising sustainable food sourcing. Even small actions can make a difference – from using a local allotment for growing veg to simply having potted herbs in the kitchen. Having a fresh look at your current menus and looking into more eco-friendly options can boost your offer up to the next level.

AUTHOR BIO

In Olivia’s final year at university, she wrote her dissertation on ‘Ecotopias’ (speculative futures concerning the environment and the way artists and designers have depicted these futures). While digging deep into the way humans perceive art and design of this nature, she became more and more interested in eco-design and sustainability. Olivia brings her knowledge and expertise to MYA and seeks to explore the ways by which the hospitality industry can become more ‘green’. She also has the key task of guiding MYA to be carbon neutral in the near future.



INTERNATIONAL
HOTEL & CATERING
CONSULTANTS