

The Green Food/Catering Business

The burgeoning green food business is the nexus between several industries and environmental issues that include the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Food & Drug Administration, restaurant associations, and sustainability/organic trends. Most important, are the compelling consumer preferences and tastes. There are several types of green-related food catering businesses to choose from and several common issues:

- Organics vs. Sustainability
- Environmental Impacts
- Consumer concerns – eat healthfully, using sustainable business practices, chemical-free, local ingredients
- Types of Green Food Business include restaurants, catering, mobile food service, green fast food franchise, and organic food products.

About the Industry

The US catering industry includes about 8,000 companies with combined annual revenue of about \$7 billion. No major companies dominate the industry, which is highly fragmented: the top 50 companies account for less than 15 percent of industry revenue. Source: www.hoovers.com

Green Food Service in Georgia

The Green Foodservice Alliance (GFA) is a Division of the Georgia Restaurant Association and is committed to making a difference in the foodservice industry.

Mission: *TO support sustainable best practices in the Foodservice Industry through education, awareness and industry collaboration.*

For GFA purposes, foodservice is defined as any operation or facility that prepares or preps food for the direct consumption by the end user. In addition to restaurants, hotels, resorts and catering operations, the definition includes prepared food areas in traditional grocery and institutional food operations such as colleges, school systems, building cafeterias and hospitals. Traditional grocery, convenient stores, many coffee shops and food processing facilities are excluded.

The GFA works with pioneers in the industry on creating **templates for eco-friendly policies and procedures for others to follow**. Most GFA projects fall within the scope of our two Task Forces: The [Green Task Force](#) and the [Producers' Task Force](#).

Company Examples

- **Eden Foods** – Started in 1968 as a food coop. In 2009 Eden Foods was selected as the best food company in the world, and the third best company overall by *The Better World Shopping Guide*. 70,000 sq.ft. LEED warehouse; products distributed to natural food stores; developed into the Eden brand. www.edenfoods.com
- **Pizza Fusion** – franchise operations supporting organic agriculture through an organic menu and practicing an eco-friendly approach to all operations. 75% organic menu; LEED building locations. Located in 7 U.S. states and Saudi Arabia. www.pizzafusion.com
- **The Nut Box** - offers fresh, savory, wholesome, natural and organic nuts, trail mixes, dried fruits, granolas and whole coffee beans at reasonable prices. www.thenutbox.com
- **Green Truck** – located in Los Angeles, California, mobile service specializing in fresh, delicious, handmade organic food delivery, food products, and catering. Trucks are solar powered. www.greentruckonthego.com

Top 10 Lunch Trucks

1. Green Truck
2. Kogi Beef, Los Angeles
3. Calxico Carne Asada, New York City
4. Desert Truck, New York City
5. The Mighty Cone, Austin, TX
6. Skillet Street Food, Seattle
7. On The Fly, Washington, D.C.
8. Clover Food Truck, Cambridge, Mass.
9. Spencer on the Go, San Francisco
10. Roti Roli, San Francisco

Primary Green Food Business Strategies and Prevention

Source: www.greenseal.org The Green Seal Standard for Restaurants and Food Services, GS-46, establishes requirements for restaurants and food service operations that have been operating for at least three months whose primary business is preparing and serving food to the general public or private consumers. This includes full-service, limited-service, non-commercial, and catering operations.

The standard is based on life cycle research and focuses on leadership environmental improvement in the key impact areas — food, waste, and energy. Metrics, performance, and practices are combined in this standard to help operations make meaningful environmental improvement. In addition, organizational commitment is included to ensure the environmental efforts are long lasting. The standard can serve as a tool to help operations begin to take action to improve their operation and is available for Green Seal certification. Primary focus areas, **bronze level:**

- Responsible food purchases
- Energy conservation & management
- Water conservation & management
- Air quality
- Cleaning & Landscaping
- Environmentally and Socially Sensitive Purchasing Policy
- Waste reduction & management
- Company responsibility
- Continuous improvement

Source: Excerpted from City of Portland Office of Sustainable Development

Selecting a caterer who uses local ingredients and follows environmentally responsible practices can provide a higher quality service for your next event. In addition to supporting the local economy, locally produced foods travel a shorter distance from farm to plate and use less fossil fuel, resulting in a fresher, more flavorful product. Additional measures can be taken by caterers to reduce waste, making your event both easier to manage and more environmentally sustainable.

Choosing Your Caterer

If you're looking for a caterer, or are already working with one, ask if they can:

- Support locally-owned and/or minority/women-owned businesses.
- **Prepare dishes with local and/or organic ingredients.**
- Provide products that are certified as “fair-trade” (e.g. coffee).
- Provide reusable platters, tableware and/or serving dishes.
- **Use an approved biodegradable alternative that will be composted, if reusable dishware isn't available.**
- Serve dishes “family style” to avoid individually packaged products (e.g. sandwich platters, large salad bowls).
- **Provide on-site recycling of paper, plastics, metal, and glass.**
- **Collect food waste for composting.**
- Donate unused foods to shelters or Metro's Fork It Over food donation program.

Additional Sustainable Business Practices to Look For

- Use renewable energy and/or energy efficient appliances.
- Use bio-fuel or energy efficient means of transportation.
- Partnerships with other "green" businesses.

Waste Reduction and Recycling

- From disposable plates to leftover food, catered events often create a lot of waste. In addition to services your caterer offers, these simple suggestions will help you reduce waste at your catered events, conferences and meetings.
- Make it easy to recycle. Place a recycling container next to every garbage can. Label the containers with prominent signs.

Green Business Start-up: Major Steps

How to Get a Catering License in Georgia

Permits, Codes & Regulations – These will vary widely for each city and county. List applicable permits, codes and regulations:

- Register with the Georgia Department of Revenue
- Contact Georgia Department of Human Resources
- Health Department Inspections & also requires food safety training
- Obtain local, state and federal alcohol licenses

Third-party certifications – including LEED, Green Seal, trade association certifications.

(Many of these are **Expensive and OPTIONAL** and businesses can elect to build up to them over time.)

Planning: Getting Help

- Green Restaurant Association
- Green Seal (GS-46 new restaurant standards)

Short-Cuts – no certification required

- Specify energy-efficient equipment, lighting, etc.
- Research strategies to conserve water and energy
- Serve patrons water, "only on request"
- Specify biodegradable packaging and materials
- Use low or no VOC's paints
- Use recycled paper and vegetable dyes for all printing
- Low Carbon Calculator - Low Carbon Diet Program - The Daily Green - A new green food *calculator* can help you choose ingredients www.thedailygreen.com

Handout: GS-46 Standard Summary www.greenseal.org

Resources

1. **The Georgia Department of Community Health** – complete information on food service codes, rules, and regulations. www.health.state.ga.us
2. **Sustainable Food News** is the leading source of daily, online news and market information for the organic, sustainable and natural food industries. www.sustainablefoodnews.com
3. **The National Organic Program and the Organic Foods Production Act** (USDA) are intended to assure consumers that the organic foods they purchase are produced, processed, and certified to be consistent with national organic standards. www.usda.gov
Organic Labeling and Marketing Fact Sheet
Labeling Packaged Goods

Catering Food Donation (a component of green food practices)

The **Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act** (Pub.L. 104-210, 110 Stat. 3011, enacted October 1, 1996) was created to encourage food donation to nonprofits by minimizing liability, in accordance with the Model Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. Signed into law by President Bill Clinton, this law, named after Rep. Bill Emerson makes it easier to donate food by allowing donor liability only in cases of gross negligence.

Excerpted from: Incorporate the Community into Events by Working with Local Food Banks

How to Work with Local Food Banks

By Rob Hard, About.com Guide

Food Donation at MPI MeetDifferent

For MeetDifferent, February 2009 in Atlanta, MPI partnered with the Atlanta Food Bank. Founded in 1979, the Atlanta Community Food Bank distributes almost 2 million pounds of food and other donated grocery items monthly to more than 800 non-profit partner agencies in 38 counties in Metro Atlanta and North Georgia.

MPI volunteers assisted in the Product Recovery Center (PRC), which provides quality food, beverages, and health products to over 800 non-profit partner agencies in Metro Atlanta and the area. These partner agencies, in turn, distribute these products to individuals and families in need. Volunteers make this possible by sorting, inspecting and packing donated items for these groups. The PRC is a fun, hands-on project for groups, families, businesses, schools, and individuals. Conference attendees were provided an opportunity to volunteer for the effort by registering online prior to the conference to work one of two different shifts at the Food Bank (morning or afternoon).

The Atlanta Food Bank www.acfb.org Through the **Atlanta's Table** project, we recover excess prepared foods from caterers, hotels, and restaurants. One of the first programs of its kind in the nation, Atlanta's Table now has more than 200 donors. To learn more, go to **Donating Made Simple**. You may also contact Daniel Hernandez at daniel.hernandez@acfb.org or (404) 892-3333 ext. 1234.

Food donors are protected from liability through the **federal and state Good Samaritan food law**.