

PART VI

ENVIRONMENTAL AND FOOD SAFETY ISSUES

Carbon Footprint Defined

In recent years, many chefs, culinary students, foodservice operators and consumers have become more aware and concerned with key issues affecting the environment, and specifically the food supply. The term “carbon footprint” is now applied to food as a measure of the impact its growth, harvest, transportation and even preparation have on the environment. Simply defined, a [carbon](#) footprint is a measure of the impact human activities have on the environment in terms of the amount of [greenhouse gases](#) produced, measured in units of [carbon dioxide](#). It is a useful measurement for individuals and organizations to conceptualize their impact in contributing to global warming. A study carried out in 2006 at the Tara Garrett Center for Environmental Strategy at the University Of Surrey, England, demonstrated that hydroponic greenhouse tomatoes require more land and energy use to get the same output as field-grown tomatoes. The energy used in production can offset any energy savings in transportation or distance traveled when considering a food’s carbon footprint. An Ecological Footprint study in British Columbia found that for a greenhouse to produce 1000 tons of tomatoes, the environmental resources required are 14 to 21 times greater than for the same production from conventional field operations. In Europe, where the issue receives much greater attention, tests in the U.K. and Sweden have both shown that field-grown tomatoes transported from Spain have less CO2 emissions by the time they reach the market than greenhouse tomatoes domestically grown.

Sustainable Foods

Another area of concern for consumers and operators is the inclusion of menu items which establish a collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies, also known as sustainable foods. This movement incorporates sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption, focusing on a preference to buy locally produced goods and services when available. Incorporating Florida field-grown tomatoes can play an important role in helping address the overall sustainability issue, while reducing reliance on tomatoes imported from other countries.

Food Safety

With outbreaks in recent years of salmonella in tomatoes and E. coli contamination found in spinach and lettuce, concern for the overall safety of other fruits and vegetables has raised justifiable concern. Given that both of the cases of E. coli contamination were linked to animal feces as well as irrigation waters, agriculture producers and packers have become keenly aware of these risk factors and endeavored to implement policies and procedures to greatly reduce the risk of contamination. Florida is the first state in the country to adopt a comprehensive food safety program with mandatory government inspection and audit of its tomatoes.

Producers and packers of Florida field-grown tomatoes have implemented key measures to continue to keep the supply safe and free of contamination. Specific measures include: strict animal control procedures, establishment of environmental and assessment records,

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and expanded internal audits. The protocols and record keeping of Florida's tomato industry instill confidence by suppliers, operators and consumers in the safety of its food.

You can find much more on the topic of food safety, including the Tomato Best Practices Manual, by visiting http://www.floridatomatoes.org/food_safety.html.

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