



A Study of What  
Sustainability Currently

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By Emily Ritchie

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This narrative examines how the concept of “sustainable” is utilized and practiced in restaurants today. The qualitative research lays out the stories of 21 restaurants and a handful of experts in the field. From interviews conducted in person or by phone in Portland, the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and in Ithaca, N.Y. the following types of practices and issues emerged: local sourcing; humane treatment of animals; no pesticides sprayed, or antibiotics used; careful stewardship of ecosystems; sustaining families and communities; “natural,” grass-fed beef; tracing food back to the source; reducing fish by-catch; minimizing waste. This information is aimed at restaurateurs who want to know what other restaurants are doing to be sustainable. These narratives are also written so that consumers can better understand how complex the issues can be surrounding sustainable food in restaurants.

Among the solutions proposed are: using sources such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium to help design menus containing sustainably caught fish; buying grass finished beef; and buying more local produce from a farmer you know and trust. Alice Waters of Chez Panisse and Dave Dietrich of Moosewood, both suggest restaurateurs write down a mission statement to pin down exactly how the restaurant will run.

## INTRODUCTION

Before I wrote this thesis, I was pretty sure I knew what the word “sustainable” meant. I had helped out with many of Occidental’s “sustainability” initiatives: planting and maintaining a communal garden, raising chickens, joining the sustainability fund committee to award grants, developing a group that planned and cooked meals for other students. It was this food club, a group that calls itself “Well Fed,” that really got me thinking (the photo on the cover is from a meal we made). We did everything we could think of to be “sustainable:” shopped at Farmer’s Markets and thrift stores, cooked only what was in season, and carefully planned our use of cars. We fed a lot of people. In some ways we were acting like a restaurant’s owner or chef. So it occurred to me to investigate what sustainability means to real owners and chefs of restaurants, using the simplest method: I called people or visited and asked what they thought. I found out that “sustainability” is one of those things that are, at one and the same time, both very real and very hard to define.

In our own cooking, “sustainability” meant choosing local ingredients that were in season and had been grown with “best practice” agriculture, if not always by ourselves, then by someone who cared about maintaining good soil, using water wisely, not using pesticides. “Sustainability” didn’t seem like a problematic concept until I saw the term being used in a fast food restaurant chain, and then I began to wonder whether my understanding and everyone else’s understanding overlapped. When I say “apple,” and you say “apple,” we might have two different kinds of apples in mind, but we know that we’re not talking about oranges or grapes. Was the same true of “sustainability”?

Before I asked the restaurateurs, I checked the definition of “sustainable” in the dictionary and found other sources that seemed like they might help me define the term. Sustainable, according to the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in the 1987 report *Our Common Future*, is defined as meeting “the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of

future generations to meet their own needs” (27). This was a good starting point. In search of a more precise definition, I turned to the Oxford English Dictionary online. It begins, “1. Capable of being borne or endured; supportable, bearable.” This term was first used in 1611. In 1845 a new meaning appeared, “2. Capable of being upheld or defended; maintainable.” This second one is closer to the ideas people have of the word currently, but the third and most recent meaning seems most similar. “3. Capable of being maintained at a certain rate or level,” first used in 1965. Webster agrees, “sustainable: capable of being sustained.” Of course a note played on a piano is “capable of being sustained,” (it can be made to continue for a while, creating a short-term effect) so exactly how helpful are these definitions?

I think the dictionary cannot give me greater precision because the word “sustainable” is currently used in many ways. It is ambiguous and represents very complex issues. Sustainability goes beyond food procurement too, for example, workers’ rights, and a sense of social justice. In many people’s minds, ethical behavior, and sustainability are linked; you cannot have one without the other. For others, sustainability is just a matter of buying good, fresh produce or harvesting fish carefully.

I began my interviews with restaurateurs and discovered that most of them have some sort of concept of sustainability in their heads and that there is some overlap in the definition. Yet, they are clearly not all talking about the same thing. Thus, this research aims to demonstrate complexity and to show the wide variety of models of sustainability that there are along the west coast. I also hoped to find out what barriers are preventing more restaurants from becoming sustainable. In the course of my research, I realized sustainable is a very broad term but there is some general agreement about what it means.

My intent to study restaurants was not just to discover the definition. There are many good reasons to study restaurants. Food is an enormous part of everyone’s lives, yet I see very disturbing trends in America that are hurting our ecosystem. I saw a need for looking into an improved food system and decided that

restaurants have the ability to lead the way. In her master's thesis at Royal Roads University in British Columbia in 2008, Kristi Peters Snider detailed why restaurants are a good starting place for a transition to a more sustainable food system.

Restaurants are capable of introducing foods and influencing consumer choice; the root of many local food systems can be traced to the link between restaurant chefs and farmers; and lastly, restaurant food expenditures are vast and provide a viable market for local farm products. (Peters Snider, 10)

As she points out, restaurants can provide a market for farmers who are producing food in a sustainable manner. According to Dinegreen.com, "as a result of a restaurant's purchasing decisions, the industry can mitigate many of the detrimental effects of factory farming, meat production, pesticide use, fishery depletion, and transporting food, and move forward in supporting sustainable, organic and local family farms" (dinegreen.com). There are many issues that need to be addressed. I realized that restaurants have a huge buying power and would be a good starting point for addressing sustainable food issues. I assumed that at least when it comes to procurement sustainable had to do with eating locally, organically, and within the seasons. I knew that our national agriculture system significantly impacts our resources (water, soil, air) and that improvements can be made. I set out to find out what restaurants knew about the complex issue of sustainability.

I reasoned that sustainable food procurement would vary not only from person to person but also possibly by place, so I chose three cities for my research. I spoke with owners in Portland, the Bay Area, and Los Angeles. Portland does not get very cold in the winter. There may be snow on the ground for about three days the whole winter. Los Angeles is certainly very well known for its attractively warm climate. San Francisco, too, is pretty temperate. These three cities are able to get produce that does not have to travel far. I also wanted to know how a city can eat local food if the ground is covered in snow for half the year, like in New York, so I spoke with an owner of Moosewood Restaurant in Ithaca, NY to get an idea of

sustainability in a cold place. Ithaca has snow on the ground much of the year (ci.ithaca.ny.us). Moosewood cannot necessarily buy locally in the same sense as restaurants on the west coast. Finally I returned to the source, or at least to one of the most famous originators of the idea of a sustainable restaurant, Alice Waters.

Overall, I suggest that there is no single answer to the question “what does sustainable currently mean in the restaurant business”? The research I conducted shows a variety of definitions and models. It offers a spectrum of ideas to owners of restaurants and those who seek a model of how to open a sustainable restaurant, or for people who frequent sustainable restaurants and want to know what to look for. My research highlights the many approaches one can take to serve sustainable food in restaurants.. From my interviews, here is a list I developed of subjects to consider: humane treatment of animals; no pesticides sprayed, or antibiotics used; stewardship of ecosystems; sustaining families, communities; “natural”; grass-fed; capable of tracing the food back to the source; local; compost waste; wild fish; small amounts of waste; organic; biodynamic; community; fair trade; hook and reel-caught fish; do not degrade the environment or human health; take into account communities and their need for survival; direct trade; relationship/trust farmer; knowing the source of the food; good worker treatment.

I started out thinking I knew and understood what I was going to study. After studying it, I know more, and I know how much I don't know.

## A CONTEXT TO SUSTAINABLE FOOD

Currently, we have a broken food system. We cannot continue to eat in the same manner and expect to be personally healthy and to maintain a healthy earth. Our system is not sustainable. There are a wide variety of problems related to our system, including but not limited to: energy consumption, soil erosion, need of crop rotation, pesticides, workers' rights, climate change, methane emissions, externalities, the use of fossil fuels, fertilizers, food security, carbon emissions, food waste, CAFOs, food miles, species extinction (especially fish), air pollution, public health. This short list of the myriad of problems, details how our current food system is not sustainable. This research will only delve into food procurement policies of restaurants in an attempt to find out how restaurants can know what the right choices are to decrease their imprint on the earth.

In the beginning of my research, I was curious why people are so interested in eating at sustainable restaurants. I came across a study in the *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* (by Hsin-Hui Hu, Parsa, and Self) called "The Dynamics of Green Restaurant Patronage" done in Taiwan to uncover some reasons customers eat at green restaurants. The study cited concluded that knowledge about recycling was a significant predictor of recycling behavior (347). K. Chan (1999) noted that knowledge about ecological issues is a significant predictor of environmentally friendly behavior. In addition, the study in Taiwan found that knowledge generally influences pro-environmental attitudes, which in turn motivate ecologically or environmentally responsible consumer behavior (Hu, Parsa, Self, 345). A Canadian study by M. Laroche also found that individuals who were highly knowledgeable about environmental issues were more willing to pay a premium price for green products (Hu, Parsa, Self, 347). Hu, Parsa, and Self also found that the more educated a customer was, the stronger his/her intentions were to patronize a green restaurant, which was consistent with results from earlier studies (Hu, Parsa, Self, 354). They saw that in Taiwan, it was the older, more educated consumers with higher income levels who were "more likely to patronize a green restaurant" (360). I

cannot be sure that this applies to the US, yet these trends are so strong that I expect many transfer in some way to American restaurant-goers.

There are a growing number of conscious consumers who are realizing that agriculture uses up massive amounts of energy. One study estimates, “of the 10-20 percent of the food system’s fossil fuel energy that is used by agricultural operations, 40 percent is indirect energy consumption; that is, the energy it takes to produce chemical fertilizers and pesticides” (Deumling, Wackernagel, Monfreda, 7). Much energy is consumed indirectly; it goes not only for fertilizers, but for other sectors of our food system, such as packaging. Ironically, the food that is commonly eaten now, that has been sprayed with chemical fertilizers, grown in mass quantities, on land that is not rotated or rested, has less nutritional value compared to produce from farmers who treat their land respectfully (Kingsolver 239).

Transporting the food from the farm ultimately to the consumer also consumes energy and adds to the food’s carbon footprint; this sector is measured in food miles. Food miles should be used wisely, not as the only measurement to calculate the energy consumption and carbon footprint<sup>1</sup> of food products. Tom Tomich, researcher and director of the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, suggested that local does not necessarily mean better, environmentally speaking. Distance traveled is important to think about, but as a component of the whole system, including food packaging, growing and processing techniques. Transportation by container ship or rail is relatively energy efficient, although for both there are also environmental and health externalities to consider. Shipping food by air or in a 25-year-old pickup is not so efficient. Additionally, the author suggests that “a plant-based diet tends to have a much smaller carbon footprint than a diet that includes meat, [...] because a pound of steak requires many more pounds of grain as feed — and all the carbon emissions associated with that, from fertilizers that are derived from fossil fuels to

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<sup>1</sup> 1 A New York Times article defined a carbon footprint as a measure of the “impact of human activities on the environment in terms of the amount of greenhouse gases produced” (Martin).

the fuel for the combines used for the harvest” (Martin). Consumers’ habits have a huge effect on the carbon footprint of food as well. Driving to the grocery store as opposed to walking or biking takes up more energy. Also, throwing all waste into a trash bin increases the footprint. Composting is a good solution and not driving to the store multiple times in a week. Thus food miles is one tool to measure energy consumption in a complex system.

One contradiction to the food miles argument is the energy calculation for making/growing the food. For example, a tomato grown in California and shipped to Maine may use less energy than a tomato grown in a winter greenhouse in Maine, heated by carbon fueled electricity which does not travel far to the consumer. Eating seasonally can avoid the miles problem and sometimes the greenhouse problem. Another argument is that food tastes so much better when it is at the peak of its season and does not travel too far.

The American dependence on oil to fuel our food system endangers our food security. This dependence on fossil fuel makes food prices very dependent on gas prices, when other factors could really control prices. Again, this brings the argument back to sustainability. Because gas prices can increase enormously or the availability of gas could sharply decrease (i.e. a war in the middle east), the sustainability of the current production system is jeopardized. The EPA states that “in the United States, 6.6 tons of greenhouse gases are emitted yearly by each person. This translates to more greenhouse gas emitted per person in the U.S. than any other country in the world” (Conklin, 8). The US uses much more than its fair share of energy, a fact that cannot be maintained.

In trying to maximize profits, we end up making unusual trades with other countries. We value the price of food so highly that we often import the same product that we’re also exporting, in order to sell it at a higher price than that at which we buy it. In Lorraine Conklin’s thesis she writes of an example from Angela Paxton of the Centre for Alternative Technology: “in 1997 in the UK, 126 million liters of milk were imported while 270 million liters were exported” (10). This weird movement of goods must make sense economically, due to subsidies and exchange

rates. Yet, not only is the move a waste of energy and effort, but there are also hidden costs to this exchange.

## RESEARCH FROM THE FIELD

### Local:

Though Tom Tomich argues that buying “local” does not always and necessarily equate with buying “better” in environmental terms (see page ten), buying local food is a sustainable solution because it keeps the dollars in the local food region, encourages face-to-face interactions, reduces food security worries (such as E.coli, genetically modified foods, pesticide residues), plus, it generally tastes better because of its freshness (Halweil, 15.). In her master’s thesis, Kristi Peters Snider wrote, “sustainable food systems promote sustainable agriculture practices and locally based food production, and have a minimal impact on land, air, water, and natural resources.” (30). She was careful to qualify that the “meaning of local differs based on region and growing conditions” (Peters Snider, 74).

It is difficult to define local because it varies depending on the product (and the region, especially when trying to keep dollars local). Produce may be categorized as local differently from other products such as cheese. However, in the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act, Congress defined local and regional as “less than 400 miles from the origin of the product; or the State in which the product is produced.” Barbara Kingsolver writes in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* about her year-long stint eating only food grown by herself or bought from a neighbor in her town. In her words,

‘Locally grown’ is a denomination whose meaning is incorruptible. Sparing the transportation fuel, packaging, and unhealthy additives is a compelling part of the story, but the plot goes well beyond that. Local food is a handshake deal in a community-gathering place. It involves farmers with first names, who show up week after week. It means an open-door policy on the fields, where neighborhood buyers are welcome to come have a look, and pick their food from the vine. Local is farmers growing trust. (123)

Local may be considered as small as her town's boundary, or it could be delineating the size of a city and its surrounding, while some people use the term to mean a state or nation. Local may also be describing the idea of a bioregion or a Holdridge life zone, which follows a pattern of altitude, latitude, and humidity. Really, the goal is to buy food from the closest possible source. Sticking to a specific unified mileage is unrealistic because people live in such varied places that one rule cannot be applied to all regions. Food miles explain part of the energy consumption of the food system, but by no means tell the whole story.

## Beef:

Michael Pollan devotes a segment of his book, The Omnivore's Dilemma to the current unsustainable way farmers raise cattle. Starting with a bit of history, he reasons that

The urbanization of America's animal population would never have taken place if not for the advent of cheap, federally subsidized corn. [...] Corn found its way into the diet of animals that never used to eat very much of it (like cattle) or any corn at all, like the farmed salmon now being bred to tolerate grain. [...] Already in their short history CAFOs have produced more than their share of environmental and health problems: polluted water and air, toxic wastes, novel and deadly pathogens. (Pollan, 67)

Making cows, which evolved to eat grass, eat corn had several consequences for their health, for the land, and for the consumers (Pollan, 68).

Currently, Pollan writes, the most detrimental harm to the environment associated with the cattle industry happens on the feedlot. Ruminants have evolved to convert grass into high-quality protein, something one-stomached animals cannot do. The older method of growing meat on grass makes brilliant ecological sense: "it is a sustainable, solar-powered food chain that produces food by transforming sunlight into protein" (Pollan, 70). This was a sustainable process that evolved

after many years of humans fostering cattle for dairy and meat. For this new system, cows have to be fed pharmaceuticals in order to eat so much corn. There is more and more research suggesting that many of the health problems associated with eating beef are really problems with corn-fed beef (Pollan, 75). Because they are eating grain, the cows develop sicknesses such as Bloat, which is when the animal's rumen produces gas that can't escape and so expands, pushing on the animal's lungs and suffocating it. Another problem is Acidosis, which is a kind of bovine heartburn that usually does not kill the animal but makes it really sick and weakens the immune system, causing it to be even more susceptible to feedlot diseases. According to Pollan, cattle rarely live on feedlots for more than 150 days. Their livers cannot take much more than that, it not being a sustainable, or maintainable diet.

Pollan goes further in his explanation of the detrimental effects of cows on feedlots. He writes, "most of the antibiotics sold in America today end up in animal feed, a practice that is [...] leading directly to the evolution of new antibiotic-resistant superbugs" (78). Moreover, the waste produced by animals in feedlots is so high in nitrogen and phosphorus that it cannot be used to fertilize produce because it would kill the plants. Feedlots also contaminate nearby water sources (Pollan, 79). The money that goes towards feeding and taking care of cows does not begin to cover the external costs to the public health of antibiotic resistance or food poisoning by *E. coli* 0157:H7. Pollan insists that the system "doesn't take into account the cost to taxpayers of the farm subsidies that keep [...] raw materials cheap. And it certainly doesn't take into account all the many environmental costs incurred by cheap corn" (Pollan, 83). In an attempt to make beef cheaper, the industry has pushed the costs onto the environment and the public. Author Barbara Kingsolver writes that "raising food without polluting the field or the product will always cost more than the conventional mode that externalizes costs to taxpayers and the future" (115). This problem is not only identified by Michael Pollan. Voices from talk-show host Oprah Winfrey to Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*, have denounced the conditions inside CAFOs (Kingsolver, 228).

## METHODS

My research objective was to portray different food sustainability models in restaurants along the west coast. I interviewed 21 chefs/owners to hear how restaurants make decisions about what food to buy. I tried to do as many as possible in person, but some were also conducted by phone. I asked mostly open-ended questions, including questions about their produce, meat, and fish decisions. I also asked about products that the chefs could not live without, such as cheese or olive oils. I queried them about the barriers they faced to stick with certain decisions. Finally, I asked all the chefs to define sustainable for me. Some chefs were deeply engaged in the issue, telling me about the books they read and the movements they follow. Others were less engaged. I hope my results and findings are applicable to other restaurants where the owner wants to be more sustainable or see how other restaurants are tackling issues. Besides the owners, I also interviewed a journalist, academics, experts in the field, and non-profits. My background research comes from a series of books, dissertations, theses, journals, and other studies.

My research is by no means comprehensive. I chose the three cities, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles for the ease of the locations. I contacted about 50 restaurants via email or phone that promoted themselves as either sustainable, or promoted one or several aspects of sustainability, using terms such as local, green, seasonal, organic, farm-to-table, etc. I interviewed those that responded to my query. I chose Portland because I am from there, which made in-person interviews accessible. Secondly, I chose Los Angeles for the same reason, that I live here during the school year, so I could conduct in-person interviews as much as possible. Thirdly, I chose San Francisco, looking for any changes between cities. I spent one weekend there, meeting chefs and conducting interviews. Moosewood is the outlier in the combination. I picked the cooperative because I was in Ithaca, NY for a weekend and so it was convenient to interview them. Being a co-op in a cold climate, they provide a different model of sustainability, and they prove longevity by lasting

for 38 years, just two years younger than Chez Panisse. They provide a contrast to the temperate climates of the west coast.

During my interviews, chefs remind me that restaurants are first of all businesses, and that they attract customers for the quality of the food. Yet, from the Cornell Hospitality study, it is clear that customers also pick restaurants because they advertise sustainability. The word sustainable on a menu or website can only help a restaurant these days. Businesses are commonly seeing that the younger generations are paying attention to where food comes from. Portlanders especially, take an interest in the source of their food. We are so well known for these attributes that the new TV show called “Portlandia” stereotypes the city in a humorous manner. The very first episode shows a couple that is so interested in the origins of their chicken at a restaurant (asking about animal rights, hormones and feed), that they get up from their table, announce that they’ll be back, and drive off to visit the local farm to see where Colin, the chicken, was raised. Granted, the scene is humorous because of the exaggeration, but I doubt it is too far from reality.

Generally, I found that the restaurants were higher-end restaurants that seemed to have clients willing to pay a little more for food from the farmers market, or that was organic. However, the prices at these restaurants varied. Dinner at Four Café in Eagle Rock ranges from \$6-\$13. Méliisse, in Santa Monica, charges \$105-\$165 for their prix fixe menu. Likewise, I saw a trend in the ethnicity of the food, which was heavier on French, Californian, and Italian, but I did try to supplement these interviews with other ethnic foods. Andina in Portland sells Peruvian food; Blue Hen is Vietnamese. Burgerville represents a fast-food chain restaurant which primarily sells burgers. Tataki in San Francisco, sells Japanese. Finally, Border Grill has a Latin flair. My goal is to not compare restaurants, but to provide models of sustainably procured food in restaurants. My study is a search to identify what sustainably procured food means in restaurants.

## INTERVIEWS

### PART 1:

The term sustainable has many different meanings. There are commonalities in the definition, such as people thinking about local, considering buying seasonally, purchasing via direct relationships with farmers, buying organic food, and at the same time remaining economically viable. Yet, I found that the term often means different things to different people. Produce, fish, and meat should be examined separately.

#### Produce:

I spoke with Christine Farren from the non-profit Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture (CUESA) in San Francisco. They maintain a list on their website of the restaurants that regularly shop at the Ferry Building market ([cuesa.org](http://cuesa.org)). She explained that “inclusion on this list does not necessarily mean that these restaurants are “sustainable” in their labor practices, or in their meat choices, etc. It just means that they shop at our farmers market.” CUESA encourages chefs to shop at the market by providing parking spaces near the entrance for them and carts so they can easily carry their purchases. The Ferry Building market falls under California direct marketing laws that require markets to be California grown only. The average distance a farmer travels to their market is 109 miles, although there are no mileage limitations on the farmers.

Farren defined sustainable as food that is environmentally sound, which can be an on-going process. She also includes in her definition humane animal treatment and added that the business should be economically viable and socially just for the workers.

Finally, CUESA’s website states, sustainable farmers,

Use less fossil fuel, produce fewer greenhouse gases, and often depend on human labor rather than chemicals and energy-intensive technology. Sustainable farms encourage biodiversity, conserve scarce water resources, and build healthy soil through techniques like composting and planting cover crops. Sustainable ranchers raise a moderate number of animals at a time -- not more than the land can support -- and often rotate the animals around a pasture to minimize their impact. (cuesa.org)

To get sustainable produce, there are many layers to consider.

### Fish:

Sustainable fish in restaurants is a difficult topic to navigate. The current, prevalent fishing techniques are not sustainable. We know this because the oceans are in trouble. The Pew Oceans Commission warned in 2003 that the oceans are in a state of “silent collapse.” The Monterey Bay Aquarium estimates that as much as 90% of the large predatory fish such as shark, swordfish and cod have been fished out of the oceans (montereybayaquarium.org). Many populations are in danger of going extinct. My aim was to comprehend how restaurants can better understand the issues and choose fish that are not already over-fished and are sustainably caught. I spoke with Casson Trenor, author of Sustainable Sushi: Saving the Oceans One Bite at a Time (2009) and Erik Vance, author of the article “The New School of Fish” published in the San Francisco Magazine (2011) to learn what they thought.

Casson Trenor, who works for Tataki Sushi in San Francisco, suggested the key to eating sustainable seafood means eating lower down on the food chain and to source fish that are not endangered. This means avoiding the more popular items such as farmed salmon, eel, cod, Blue Fin tuna, etc. Tataki also tries to sell seafood caught sustainably, by which Trenor refers to methods like line fishing. Tataki chooses fish that are abundant and the restaurant does not fly the orders fish over.

Instead, Trenor will order fish that is shipped by boat. The majority of their fish is domestic.

I spoke with Erik Vance to better understand the complicated food system surrounding fish and to learn how restaurants can choose sustainable fish for their restaurants. He began warning me that most restaurants either have no idea about fish or are purposefully obfuscating what is on their menu. To define sustainability, Vance asked the question, will there be fish for my children and grandchildren in the same numbers as now? If the answer is yes, then it is sustainable.

He sees the claims of restaurants of being sustainable as too often being a gimmick to bring in clients despite chefs claiming that clients only come because the food tastes good. Vance thinks that restaurant owners are wrong when/if they say that clients aren't coming to eat for sustainable reasons. When it is advertised, the owners are being paid to serve sustainable food. Vance wavered between feeling like he was being cheated as a customer, and seeing that people are doing the best they can. On the one hand, if you're going to Chez Panisse, you're assuming you're paying extra for the real hard research and a service of sustainable food. On the other, who wants to pay more than seems necessary or right?

He feels that things like carbon offsets and fair treatment for workers are great issues, but a fish buyer should think about the supply for future generations. Things to consider when looking for sustainable fish are population health and a catch method that does not waste a lot of fish. Sustainable fishing does not include trawling or catching red-listed fish. Hook and reel is a better technique for fishing. Some animals' populations have dropped by 80% or 90%. When they crawl back up to 80% we still shouldn't eat them. We should give them a chance to increase their population again. There is a disconnect between the industry and the buyer. The industry seems to think that the terms local and sustainable are the same thing.

Vance explained that we need to pay attention to how the population is doing and how the species is caught. The current method of capture is inefficient. We have to ask, "what are you killing in order to get the fish you want?" Shrimp is 30 to 1, as in 1 shrimp is caught for every 30 other species that are bycatch. Bycatch is almost

always thrown out. That is a lot of waste! A ratio of 1 to 1 is still not good; it is not sustainable. The most sustainable method pulls in only the fish that is going to be sold. We need to protect the neighbors of that species.

He found that,

There is a booming demand for sustainably caught fish. It can be found at restaurants across the price spectrum, from Chez Panisse to (I kid you not) McDonald's. But at the same time, many of our most famous chefs continue to put unsustainable choices like ahi tuna, monkfish, and farmed salmon on their menus, while their most respected suppliers keep selling red-listed fish to whoever wants it. Even the many chefs who go out of their way to ask the right questions of the people they get their fish from can be misled by the half-truths told all along the supply chain. In the end, despite our best intentions, much of what we're told or assume about the provenance of the seafood we eat is essentially a fish story. (Vance, 2011)

After writing that, he admitted that it is really hard to dictate strict lines about what is sustainable and what is not. He suggests that a good question to ask is how many fish are you pulling in, and are you pulling them in more than one at a time? On regulations, he said Alaska is really well regulated, but fish that is labeled from Alaska is not always the full story. If it is the middle of winter, the fish is probably not from Alaska. People need to watch out for mislabels and confusion. We need to be skeptical.

Vance found numerous wholesalers or chefs who purposefully create confusion around terminology. For example, line fishing is not simply hook, line, and reel fishing. Long-lining is when you leave the lines out for a long time, which gives the fish or birds, turtles or sharks that bite the hook a long time to bleed or starve to death. Many animals that bite will be bycatch. Long-lining is hook and line fishing, but not hook and reel fishing! There is much terminology mix up and deception. Likewise, trolling (different from trawling) is dragging a line behind you. It is similar to line fishing, but the boat is moving. A method just can't be called sustainable if it catches twice as much as it takes in.

He continued, explaining that the new generation of thinking about sustainable proclaims that ‘you can’t have it.’ The old way of thinking about sustainable, like that of Alice Waters, is trying to find the same product, but in a sustainable manner. Now, the idea is ‘no you can’t have it, but you can have this other great thing.’ That’s what younger foodies are getting into. They are big on saying no. But, I wondered, is that sustainable to say no all the time? What about people’s needs and wants? Can they sustain a diet when they’re being told ‘no’ a lot? He agreed that it is a good point to think about.

There are a lot of fish labeled “sustainable” that are not, like farmed salmon which are fed four times the amount of fish than you get in return. But how much, I asked, do they eat in the wild? Their diets change a lot in captivity. Some of the numbers are nuanced. Salmon, top predators in the wild, get fed high levels of food so that they get big fast, as are animals in CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations). Today there wouldn’t be that many salmon out in the wild as there are farmed. But, I asked, there used to be lots of salmon out there... Farmed salmon, Vance explained, is clever, efficient, and doesn’t totally deplete the stock, but the salmon have to eat something. They’re fed grains and plant oils, and to yield 1 kg of farmed fish, they must be fed 4kg of wild fish (confirmed by [theecologist.org](http://theecologist.org)). A sustainable way to think would be do we really need to have salmon? Can we try something else? That is the mentality that we need to have going forward: try something else. I think, he said, it is possible. We did it with produce (“who ate Kale 40 years ago?”); we can do it with fish.

Furthermore, he does not think chefs are doing a good job when they say they serve sustainable fish. Like he said earlier, people are paying for not just the art of cooking, some people are coming into a restaurant because it advertises that it is sustainable! Chefs think the customers are coming in for the flavor, which is only half true. There are a lot of resources and people who will partner with a restaurant/chef, really cheaply or free, to put together sustainable menus. An example of a resource of like that is the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Chefs can call them! There are non-profit and for-profit organizations which can help. He leans

towards the non-profits because their motivation is for the cause and as opposed for money. There are consultants who can help go through a menu, item by item. It doesn't take much time. Chefs will take the time to add cool, new flavors; why not spend the time with a consultant too? Also, he cautions, taking the distributor's word for sustainability isn't always true.

I asked him about affordability. Fish populations all over are declining while the demand worldwide has increased 2 fold since the 1980s. Yet, prices are lower because we're better at catching them and growing (farmed) fish faster. If everyone was catching fish hook and reel, one by one, you'd find discount sustainability and real sustainability, just like how McDonalds and Walmart are trying to do sustainability, there are always people who are going to be fudging at the margins. As more and more restaurants adopt stricter senses of sustainable, the people among those restaurants will find ways of doing it cheaper (ie, they might serve sardines which are plentiful and fast reproducers). This could take a real economist to tease this apart. There are fishermen who are doing reel and line fishing who sell for the same price as the trawlers. We aren't subsidizing the small guys. Yet, they are able to do it and make it work. Maybe you just can't do it and profits greatly. He marveled at the fact that organic produce costs more and the farmers get more, but that this doesn't happen for the fishermen who are catching sustainably. The restaurants get more money for sustainable fish, but not the fishermen. Restaurants can't usually buy directly from fishermen, at least a local law in San Francisco prevents it. He guesses there are health and safety reasons for it. Kenny has a commercial fishing license and also is a wholesaler, so he can sell to his own restaurant at a more affordable price.

We all need to know more, but it's too much to ask the general public to keep tabs on an entire planet's worth of fish. Some federal guidance on what qualifies as sustainable seafood, whether it's wild or farmed, is necessary. And standards must be monitored through the entire distribution chain. [...] Everyone at every step along the way has got to

ask more questions. “How was this fish caught?” is the most important one. (Vance, 2011)

Finally, he suggests everything in moderation.

### Meat:

Meat is another important factor for many in the sustainability debate. I spoke with Erica Holland-Toll, chef at a California ranch that wished to remain anonymous, about what it means to label meat as sustainable. To her, sustainable meat means animals that are not given hormones or steroids. The hormones and steroids are not good because they are bad for the environment when they turn up in the animal’s waste, and they are also harmful to human bodies when we eat the animal. The steroids are used to manipulate the animal’s body’s system to put on weight fast, which is unnatural. Some farms do it because it is expensive to let animals grow fat on their own schedule because they have to be taken care of that whole time. Animals also need room to run around and act naturally.

Her ranch also raises animals on grass and does not finish them on grain. However, Holland-Toll explained that organic grain may be a sustainable feed under certain circumstances. Grain is a bit ambiguous. It is certain that feeding animals on corn or soy are not sustainable because they are both rich in energy and so fatten up the animals at a rapid pace. Holland-Toll suggested they should eat what would be in their natural environment which is mostly grass. In the winter, they can be supplemented with hay, which is the grass they eat year round, in a dry form. During the year, they might snack on barley or rice bran, so those grains are more acceptable. They won’t get sick on them like they do eating corn. To her, sustainable means a different set of values.

I asked Holland-Toll the same question I asked Trenor of Tataki. Is it more sustainable to stop eating meat altogether? She responded saying that instead of cutting all meat out, we should remember to eat everything in moderation. It is

sustainable if we look for a humane treatment of animals and farmers who take the stewardship of their land seriously.

A barrier to sustainable meat is the higher cost compared to industrial meat. People always complain to her about the cost of good food. Prather sells to a niche market and to a population in the Bay Area that wants sustainable meat. They trust her ranch and understand their food. She sells mostly to the Bay Area (7 farmers markets per week, plus there is a permanent store in the Ferry Building in SF).

Sustainable food systems are moving across America. She said we have to be educated and know the difference between sustainable and not. She said you can go most places in the US now and find people doing the right thing.

## PART 2:

### Twenty-one restaurant models of sustainability:

The following are narratives from the 21 interviews I conducted over a 5-month period. The restaurants are located along the west coast (and there is one in New York state). I have organized them by region, beginning with Portland, follow with Los Angeles, and finish with the Bay Area. Moosewood is at the end, to give an idea of how a restaurant can be sustainable in New York.

## Portland

### **Burgerville:**

Burgerville is a fast-food chain restaurant only located in the Pacific Northwest. There are 39 locations heavily in Oregon, and some in Washington. I decided to interview someone at Burgerville when I ate there and noticed a compost bin next to the recycling and trash. This seemed highly unusual for a fast food joint. Burgerville's motto (found at the top of their website) is Fresh, Local, Sustainable, which encouraged me to find out what they meant.

I spoke with Jack Graves, the Chief Cultural Officer at Burgerville by phone. I began asking about their meat since they are known for their burgers. Their beef comes from Country Natural Beef, founded in 1986. According to Country Natural's website, "the cooperative consists of 120 family ranches located in Oregon, Washington, California, Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming, New Mexico, North Dakota, Colorado, Texas, Montana, Arizona and Hawaii" ([countrynaturalbeef.com](http://countrynaturalbeef.com)). They are not organic, but are certified by the Food Alliance as being "Naturally" grown. I was unsure of what that meant, but found an answer on [foodalliance.org](http://foodalliance.org) where they look for safe and fair working conditions, humane animal treatment, and careful stewardship of ecosystems. They promote respectful stewardship of the land and focus on the sustainability of their families and communities. They do not feed their

cattle antibiotics or hormones. “We produce our product by grazing the natural forages of the West’s native grasslands, pastures and forests. And, we ensure all of our practices reflect our commitment to humane animal-handling practices” (countrynaturalbeef.com).

Graves told me that his restaurants generally purchase most beef from the Eastern Oregon and Eastern Washington ranches and that they can trace all of their burger patties to the ranch, which is part of buying a product certified by Food Alliance. The beef is grass fed and finished on grain, alfalfa, and potatoes for 90 days. Graves suggested that 90 days is half the time most cattle are finished. When I searched online, it seems 90 days is the shortest amount of time beef are finished, and then longest is about 160 days.

Burgerville began as The Holland Incorporated in Portland, Oregon. It was a creamery. They slowly evolved into Burgerville, sharply defining themselves in the 90s, making a commitment to local and fresh. They differentiated themselves from competition that way. Graves suggested that local and fresh automatically includes sustainable, hence their motto.

I asked him why other restaurants, especially fast-food, are not making similar commitments. He was careful to say he could not speak for others but that he would guess fear is a big barrier. Everyone wants to watch the bottom line so that the company is profitable. Often, companies have to answer to stockholders who demand profit. Burgerville is a private company, with no shareholders, so they are able to take certain risks towards new ways of being profitable. They have actually reduced costs by approximately 50% in those restaurants that have a full composting program established (22 of 39). The hauling fees are so much lower than tipping fees in a landfill. Ninety-five percent of Burgerville’s packaging can be now composted and it is that packaging (the cups, the paper, etc.) that is the bulk of their waste. Graves estimated that they only have about 10-20lbs of food waste in a restaurant. So by using compostable packaging, they have greatly reduced what is sent to the landfill. The commercial compost haulers who take Burgerville’s food

waste away from 22 of their restaurants, can resell what turns into soil, greatly reducing the hauling fees.

I asked Graves to define sustainable and immediately he told me it is an overused term. However, he tried to define the word for me: “if we can manage picking the food products that we need and actually serving them to people in a way that leaves the land and communities in a stronger place than they would be before doing business, that is sustainable. We must leave it for generations to come.” Burgerville has spent 50 years creating local relationships and purchasing locally. Seventy percent of their ingredients come from the Pacific Northwest.

### **Paley's Place:**

Paley's Place is a tiny (50 seats), high-end restaurant in Northwest Portland. The owners, Vitaly and Kimberly Paley, are committed to organic, local, sustainable, seasonal, Pacific Northwest cuisine. I spoke with Vitaly Paley on the phone.

When we spoke about his purchasing decisions, he decided that they were perhaps not the most convenient, but quality comes first for him. He said we can't address food supply issues without addressing global sustainability issues. Paley's buys from several different farmers, most within a couple hundred-mile radius of Portland, thus his food is local and in season. If it is not in season, he will use what he stored earlier in the year (i.e. tomato sauce). He can buy lettuce almost year round and if he can't, he'll take it off the menu. He will substitute a mustard green or something else during that period. Portland only has tomatoes in the late summer, so Paley's will preserve what they can. In the winter, the cans will taste like summer and remind them of the season. They are pretty militant about which produce they get during the year. If it isn't local, they don't buy it.

He buys from 25-30 purveyors. He acknowledges that it makes life harder but his quality is guaranteed (it will be fresh from the ground or just slaughtered). He knows what happens on the path from the farmer to him. Additionally, all the containers used to transport the food to him are reusable and so the farmers can keep using them.

For cheese, he told me that the American Cheese society basically proclaimed Oregon as the new Vermont last year. There are lots of goat and sheep cheeses locally such as Riversedge Chèvre and Oregonzola. Paley's has a diverse cheese cart of between 16 and 18 cheeses. When they first started, they served about 1/3 local cheeses and now they only have 1/3 that are European. The American artisanal cheese movement has really stepped it up. Do they miss out on foreign cheeses? Well those opportunities don't come up much in Oregon. Instead, for example, there

is a producer in Oregon making Swiss-style cheeses that are just as good or better, he thinks.

For his wines, he feels that the Willamette Valley wines are not even overshadowed by Napa Valley now, they're so good. Paley's sells Northwest and French wines: 70% of them are local. Even their vinegar comes from Oregon too. They can get apple, Balsamic (from Vancouver island), and red wine vinegar, all locally.

All of his meat is local. His lamb is local from Junction City (near Eugene). His pork is from Carlton farms (south of Beaverton). His beef is also from Junction City.

For fish, he told me that there are almost no fish available all year round. He does not like Oregon halibut. He feels that salmon and halibut are over fished. Dungeness crab is the only real sustainable fish around here, and also some farmed shellfish. Other fish, though, are over fished, overpriced, the quality is not great, and neither is the availability. How, he asked, are fishermen surviving? Anything that is unsustainable is going to go away. If we continue to support this dwindling resource without letting it rest, it will go away. He shops for fish that comes from a rich fishing ground somewhere else on the planet, caught from fishermen who have been taught techniques that produce no bycatch, and are sustainable. Then, he knows, it has to fly here. There are a lot of fish people don't know about. His duty as a food professional is to introduce people to new and interesting ideas of being sustainable. He said that we can't just buy offsets. Wild fish remains on his menu because he buys it from Kanaloa Seafood in Santa Barbara. Kanaloa advertises as being a sustainable seafood purveyor that is audited by a third party for their environmental management practices.

He agrees that there are certain foreign products he can't live without. He buys chocolate via fair trade, coffee as fair trade, salt, spices, Parmesan, and some olive oil. Sustainability can only go so far as you remain human, as in true to your nature. We shouldn't be extreme about sticking with living off the earth. There's a point where you have to draw the line. We can't suffer for the sustainability; we have to be happy. He feels good if he knows the full story of where his food comes

from, without a nasty middleman profiting off something fake. Local isn't the whole story now.

I asked him where he came up with the idea of a fully sustainable restaurant. He replied that there is no other way of conducting business. He and his wife saw this in France and wanted to be just like what they had seen. He grew up in the former Soviet Union and remembers the days of eating seasonally and drinking milk from his grandma's cow. There simply was no other way for him. Even organic potatoes were the norm.

One barrier he's run into is his customers' preferences. Like at Higgins, customers look for a tomato on their burger. He'll put canned tomatoes on that burger or he'll just say no. Paley will make dishes enticing enough so that customers don't miss that tomato. For example, one dish he makes is scallops with blood oranges and Brussels sprouts. It is seasonal.

I asked, could you have Paley's Place in a very cold place? He was unsure. But he figured, if there's a will, there's a way. A restaurant in Copenhagen called Noma was recently voted the #1 restaurant in world. The chef forages for food for the restaurant. If that guy can do it, anybody can. You have to want to do it. We make things too accessible and easy for people to buy. Bad produce is shipped millions of miles to people. It's got to change. It's up to the new generation to change this. We need to educate people on how to diversify. We have malnutrition issues when people are overweight!

What does sustainable mean to you? The opposite of unsustainable. First of all, we can protect our world by investing our time into education. Restaurants need to take one step into the right direction. If you compost, you'll see a change in the staff and that we can save some money with fewer trash pick-ups. It is questioning everything you do. Sustainable could start with composting. It could also start with the treatment of our workers. It is knowing the source of a product, making people aware of that product. It is educating your staff and your consumer, creating that circle of support. You have to be encouraged. Restaurants can't make all the sacrifices. Sustainability needs to carry over to profitability. We need to

watch costs carefully. Between food and labor, you can easily put yourself out of business. But sustainable isn't that much more expensive.

I asked him, can it be affordable? He said that Americans don't prioritize our food. We don't spend much on food compared to France, or Europe. Instead, we buy lots of gadgets. Sustainable is incalculable because of health costs from the pesticides that are paid to the doctors, the harm of the food miles, and the system that is supported through taxes and subsidies for big agriculture. We need to create a global awareness. We know we will save in the future. We have to look at long-term costs. The US is a nation of processed food. We should just buy a whole chicken, eat it, then make a salad, then a soup with the remaining carcass. Affordable is just the surface story.

I asked him about the differences between restaurants in Portland versus Los Angeles. Sustainability is how far removed you are from the land. Portlanders are not very far removed, but Angelinos are. Los Angeles lacks the association with food. We gasp in horror thinking a cow died for us to eat a steak. LA's got the status, nice car, and labels. Oregon is like a land of hippies. Angelinos are now realizing they can make money doing it. But overall, we're better together than apart.

## **Papa Haydn:**

Papa Haydn has two locations: one on the east side of Portland, one on the west, plus the owners opened a small bar and rotisserie that is attached to the west side location. The restaurants are small, and are well known for their decadent desserts, though they serve main courses as well. I spoke with one of the owners, Michael Gibbons, not because Papa Haydn's advertises itself as sustainable, but because my father knows Gibbons. A graduate of Reed College, Gibbons has strong opinions about the word sustainable, so I had a long conversation with him.

Sustainable, to him is not a very attainable word. Instead, Papa Haydn's wants to minimize its carbon footprint and cost. He would hazard that the carbon footprint at a big chain like Safeway would be lower than for a farmers market because one truck goes to one store, as opposed to many trucks driving produce to a market.

They have always sourced locally (the first restaurant opened in 1978) and took pride in what is available. Sometimes, local can be a little more expensive, but they charge accordingly. Even though farmers markets probably use up more energy than mass stores, the quality of the food is better. The quality is much better when a product is local. To be energy savvy, they instead look for new and more efficient equipment. For example, Chanterelle mushrooms are better because they come from here. But lettuce is not necessarily better.

The majority of his produce comes from the San Joaquin Valley. His customers would go elsewhere if he only served root vegetables during the winter. Forty percent of his profit is from salads and sandwiches. In them, he includes tomatoes from British Columbia, grown by hydroponics because they are of such great quality. He does like the fact that his tomato guy is local and that he can have a relationship with the farmer.

On fish, he said that they do not use farmed fish because the product is inferior, and also happens to be bad for the environment. Specifically, inferior means mushier, with a higher oil content. They pay triple the price of farmed

salmon for the wild salmon they prefer. He is so close to a plentiful bounty of fish. He tries to deal with smaller purveyors and he avoids fish that are going extinct.

His beef is local, from eastern Oregon and Idaho. The pork he serves is also from Oregon. He looks at what the market will allow him to charge.

They use apple and pear wood at the restaurant as a fuel, sourced from Hood River, Oregon. The wood is the pruning and trimmings from orchards. Restaurant decisions use complex equations. Would he be better off money-wise using gas to heat his oven? Maybe, but he wouldn't get the same flavor or the same high temperature that he wants. His wood is renewable, coming from the extras at the farms. At the end of the day, he looks at what food tastes like on the plate.

He also responds to the market. There are things on the menu that he's tired of serving, but he'd be an idiot to take them off because his customers would shoot him. He has plenty of creativity within that, but there's also a big lag in the market, which is one of the reasons he is still in business after 30 years. He pays attention to what people want. But he draws the line somewhere; if customers asked him for farmed salmon, he would not serve it.

I asked if he sees a difference between his east side restaurant and his west side location in terms of what people ask for because the two parts of town are very different. His east side restaurant is near Reed College and is a little more Bohemian. There, they don't buy as much wine, but they buy higher quality wines. There, customers do not order as much meat. He still sells beef there, but not as much as pork compared to on the west side. Veal never goes over there, but it does on the west side. Overall, though, the two locations are pretty much the same. The customers order many salads and sandwiches.

I asked what he thought about the compatibility of affordability and sustainability. He responded that price is a function of demand, that it is basic economics. He is not a big believer in subsidies. Ethanol is an example of good intentions but bad outcomes with high tortilla prices in Mexico.

Gibbons was very clear that he doesn't like the concept of sustainable. He feels it is much better to look at what the carbon footprint would be, or the energy

use. There are ways of minimizing those things within the confine of the marketplace. He doesn't think sustainable means anything. The idea behind sustainable does not have to be a one word label that can go on the evening news. It's a hugely complex issue. We should look at it more like that, instead of a quick label. It should be discussed a lot more and in a more serious manner, but he's not sure that it will happen now.

Right now, Papa Haydn's number one issue is dealing with the demand of the marketplace. The economy is down right now and they don't see it getting better for a long time. Their sales fell almost 28% from last year. It's crazy. Their biggest cost is labor, so that is the first cost they have to examine. Then they look at fixed costs like building rent and utilities, never losing sight of the fact that they are in the entertainment business. They want the customer to be happy when he/she comes in and they want the person to come back. Food is a very primal thing, he said. There are few things that are more enjoyable than sitting down with people that you love and enjoying a good meal with them. Does sustainable fit in there? Yes, but it is not the first thing that he'll look at.

Gibbons feels like a higher tax on gas for cars would be a better place to start in decreasing the US's carbon footprint, instead of focusing on restaurants. If we really wanted to talk about being energy-efficient, we'd focus there. Cars are the primary users of oil. He remembers twenty-five years ago, when gas prices went up, people drove less. But, I countered, agriculture is the second user of that fuel in the US (agriculture accounts for 17 percent of total energy use in the US (Snider 21)). Should we encourage smaller farmers who use less fertilizer, and less gas-powered machinery? A mass, systemic change, he thinks, should start on a smaller level. So he does what he can with local, but for the kind of demand he's talking about, he doubts it can be met only by small farms. There has to be money to be made for the change to happen. That's the system we live in. He quoted Churchill: "it is the best of the worst." Our system has got to allow a maximum amount of individual choice. Beer, he said, is a good example of a smaller level making a

change. In Portland, beer is made locally by small producers. They've caused a change around the country. These things add up over time.

They serve a high volume of customers. On a weekend, they'll serve about 1,000 people: dinner twice, and three turns for dessert. That is just at his Westside spot, and in the summertime, it increases.

When water prices went through the roof about 10 years ago, he made sure the restaurant had lower flush toilets, and other water-efficient items. His decision was completely money-driven, not because of the environment.

## **Higgins:**

Higgins, opened in 1994 by Greg Higgins, has a reputation amongst Portlanders as being one of the top high-end restaurants for local meals. They are one of the oldest Portland restaurants that have a direct farm-to-table method. I spoke to Rich Meyer, the Chef de Cuisine. He said that 70% of their produce comes from the area around Canby which is only about 20 miles from the restaurant. This suits their seasonal menu just fine. When they want citrus, they buy from southern California and Texas. Their priority is to be as local as possible. When we spoke of specific foods, such as cheese, each had a different priority. The cheese they sell is sometimes American, sometimes European. They do not like the quality of American olive oil, so purchase Spanish oil in bulk. Occasionally, they will use some from Paso Robles, CA. They also struggle with the idea of using only local wine or vinegars.

When we spoke of barriers to sustainability, he said that trying to be completely organic would be too pricey. He gave me an example of the onions they use at the restaurant. They go through 400lbs of onions each week and they buy for about \$64. Organic onions would cost him about \$240 every week. Additionally, there is no small, local farm that can supply them with the amount of onions that they want. So he buys from Charlie's Produce, a locally owned, private company which serves the Northwest. Rich guesses the onions come from California.

He came up with about five barriers they run into when they aim for sustainability at the restaurant. One barrier we talked about are the labels. There are not enough labels on foods to know if something is truly not sprayed if you can't afford organic. Second is the price. Higgins is already considered expensive for Portland, with appetizers ranging from \$10-\$18 and a main course costs up to \$36. Third, was building the culture of sustainable restaurants in Portland. Greg built relationships by going one by one to farmers in the area to work out how to do direct sales. Rich said that Greg started this motivation to sell directly. At one time, he was in charge of the local chapter of the Chefs Collaborative, which links

restaurants that are like-minded within the Locavore movement with the aim of changing the sustainable food landscape ([chefscollaborative.org](http://chefscollaborative.org)). Fourth, he spoke of their newest challenge which is how to decide who to buy from as Portland now has so many small farms who wish to sell directly to Higgins. Their one rule on how to buy food is to “buy the best that you possibly can.” Typically, said Rich, something pulled out of the ground yesterday or that morning is going to be best. Finally, a barrier is education and altering norms. Higgins sells burgers year round and people always want a tomato on it, even though it is only local at the end of summer. That was a big problem for customers who were used to tomatoes on their burgers. Portlanders now understand that they won’t get that tomato year round and gobble up the burgers at Higgins.

We talked of fish next. They take their guidelines from the Monterey Bay Aquarium. As a rule, they never buy farm-raised fish. When buying salmon, they buy their majority from Alaska, but will look for Oregon salmon when it is in season. Furthermore, they buy hook and line caught salmon, which does not produce bycatch. Oregon fish is limited. Mostly, he said you can only get rockfish, which are not advisable according to Monterey Bay because to get them, the boats have to trawl, and then the fishermen accidentally pick up other animals. Apparently there are not a lot of options left in the Oregon waters. I asked, if there is such a scarcity, should we stop eating fish altogether, to be sustainable? He countered, explaining that there are boundaries on what we should catch, so what is available, is okay. He thinks the regulations are enough. Generally, Higgins buys fish from Alaska down to northern California.

I spoke with Rich about the ideas of affordability and sustainability coinciding. He does not think sustainable and affordable go together. Sustainable is a niche market for him. It is a misconception that local will be cheaper, such as at farmers markets. Local tastes better, but that does not make it less expensive. I asked, could a family of four, hypothetically making \$50,000 eat sustainably? He is very hesitant about this one. He thinks a lot and ultimately concludes it is possible if the family focuses on grains and legumes, cutting out high-end meat except for

once or twice a week. Maybe cutting out a lot of meat can be more affordable. Someone would have to be educated, and have the will in order to eat sustainably and affordably.

Rich receives many applications from culinary students across the US who want to intern at Higgins. He said that the majority of students have contacted him because they want to learn from a sustainable restaurant: how to buy, how to use the ingredients, etc.

## **Andina:**

Andina is a high-end Peruvian restaurant in Portland that serves a high volume of customers. I spoke with Peter Platt, the owner, who grew up in Peru. He began by explaining that there is an enormous amount of media distortion when it comes to terms like organic, sustainable, etc. We tend to overestimate the degree to which restaurants are local and seasonal. Higher-end restaurants in Portland get noticed for being sustainable.

Andina is different because they are fine dining, plus a volume business. He estimated they have 5-10 times the volume compared to their competitors. He said that Higgins began the direct farmer to restaurants relationships in Portland, but that Higgins has a different business model compared to Andina. Higgins, he estimated, would have about 120 seats, with 1.5 turns/night. By contrast, Andina does on average over 300 covers/week night and on weekends, it is 700. This puts pressure on Andina in different ways: they are two different business models.

Additionally, Higgins serves French and Northwest style foods. Andina decided not to do that. It is an ethnic restaurant with a different ingredient base. Oregon and France have similar growing abilities and seasons, so the food styles can parallel each other. Peru is completely different. To be fully seasonal, Andina would not be honestly representing Peruvian food and they would not be sustainable economically. For example, Peruvian food uses a lot of limes and avocados which do not grow in Oregon. Platt decided his restaurant would be a cultural embassy for Peru where he would present Peruvian food at a high level as well as authentically by educating his customer base, and also opening up a market base for Peruvians. An example is that they got Stumptown coffee in Portland to bring in Peruvian beans up just for Andina. Sustainability for Platt is more than sourcing locally, which asks people to limit those choices, which cannot last long term.

Instead, he has created direct, meaningful, fair relationships with the people who sell him food. It brings two communities together. He is all about connections.

Because of that, he created a link to a farm in Peru where he can buy ajíes, the peppers used in Peruvian cuisine. He linked with the farm because there was no supply chain for the ingredients he needed. South American cooking depends on olive oil, garlic, onions, and a hot pepper, an ají. The farm he partners with is in Chincha. It grows organic food based on the standards for the US and the European Union market. Additionally, he gives back to non-profits in Peru. He has outlined a model of a different form of sustainability than sourcing locally.

One of the more expensive items to serve in a restaurant is the protein. I spoke with Platt about his fish and meat policies. For fish, he tries to source locally, but he also gets fish from elsewhere like Mexico, Hawaii, and Alaska, but from sustainable businesses. He pays attention to labels. For meat, he tries to get local and grass-fed. An example is lamb. Lamb is seasonal in Oregon, but it is more expensive than lamb from New Zealand or Australia. He read a study that found the carbon footprint of lamb raised in New Zealand and shipped to Oregon was less than lamb raised in Oregon and trucked to a restaurant. He tries to make the best decision.

He is not a big fan of the word sustainable, and feels we need to move beyond it and find more nuanced descriptions. However, he gave a shot at defining the word. Any practice promoting long-term relationships and connections would be sustainable. Practices that do not degrade the environment or affect health are sustainable. Also, practices that take into account the impact on human communities and their need for survival. He supports direct trade relationships where there is a personal connection between the producers and consumers that allows a truly informed consumer decision. He asks if employers treat their animals, people, and the environment right. Without that connection, people are susceptible to corporate green washing.

I was curious why it is less common to see sustainable ethnic restaurants other than Italian or French. He was insightful. First, he said that those styles focus on many fresh ingredients and that they have a large market share. Thus, there are many distributors who can bring the kinds of foods that they require.

Contrary, many ethnic restaurants begin when immigrants want to eat their own food, like the Vietnamese and Thai population in Portland. Andina must buy ethnic ingredients from Peru. There are only a couple hundred Peruvians in Portland, so Andina is not serving Peruvians; their clientele is more general. There was no distributor for their specific ingredients. They needed quality and quantity.

He finished by explaining that food brings people to the table. When people talk about local farmers, they really mean they have a relationship with the farmer and know, and probably trust them. It is about social capital, being connected in a much more meaningful way than having a friend on Facebook. The consequence is getting good, seasonal food. We know good food when we taste it. Food is real, and people cannot bullshit about food. Food is ultimately an indicator, a symptom of a healthy society. We have to have water, land, energy, and labor practices in line, to then get good food. Good food can drive that process but then it is also ultimately the product of getting all of that other stuff right. Food is an indicator of so many other things and a facilitator. It is one of the reasons people get into the restaurant business. It is a tough business, but a tremendous amount of satisfaction comes from creating a community.

## **Decarli:**

Decarli is a restaurant in Beaverton, a suburb fifteen minutes from downtown Portland, with an “Italian-inspired menu that changes weekly featuring fresh, seasonal ingredients from the Northwest” ([decarlirestaurant.com](http://decarlirestaurant.com)). It is the type of restaurant one might expect downtown but not in Beaverton because Beaverton is known for being a typical suburb full of chain stores and restaurants. I spoke with the owner-chef, Paul Decarli.

He has to buy food every day because he keeps his inventory fairly low since things change quickly every day in terms of local availability. He said that Oregon starts out with great food that doesn't need to be cultivated (that can be found in the wild). There is a lot of naturally good food, water, and resources.

For fish, he buys salmon and albacore from Newman's fish market, owned by his father-in-law. This way he really knows where his fish is coming from and can trust who sells it to him. For fish, he tries to follow the season, like for tuna and crab. He's finding that fish is becoming very scarce and that there is a lot of farm-raised fish out there. He understands that farm-raised trout and sturgeon in Idaho are sustainable, but that farmed salmon is not. Each fish has its own rules. “It is hard to understand what fully goes into sustainable.” Mainly, it all comes down to a business decision. The customers tell you what they want. Right now, they want halibut, which comes from southeast Alaska. A lot of chefs get tired of the quality of fish that they get locally, which fluctuates. They look for consistent which sometimes means flying it from the east coast. Decarli always has a fish on the menu. He tries not to go too far from “this area” by which he means the Pacific Northwest. He will always try to buy locally first. He does include Northern California in his definition of “local.” Overall, his menu is customer driven.

“Supporting your local farmers is always a good thing. As far as the economics of it, socially, environmentally, I would rather get my mixed greens from King Fisher Farms from the coast, rather than some farm in California or Mexico. The quality is going to be better and I have a personal relationship with this

farmer. It's hard to order something when I don't know who's growing it, I don't know their practices, and I don't know if they're treating their employees fairly." He has read about just employment practices in books, and he pays attention to how he treats his workers. He feels that we should all be in tune to human fairness. He tries to visit the farms he buys from, and the cheese purveyors, etc. Anyone is allowed to go visit these farms, including to see meat being butchered. Farms in the Midwest might not be doing it as skillfully or humanely as the local places he visits. He wants to be proud to put the names of farms on his menu.

He doesn't limit himself to buying organic because farmers in the area don't find it worth it to get certified and labeled, even though they actually maintain organic practices. The certification is too much for the farmers. Does this make the consumer's job harder? It is more time consuming when he has to research all his farms. He feels he could always be better informed. It is costly to go green. Why do it then? "It's got to start somewhere. It would be easy for us to keep buying bottled water and Styrofoam and all this stuff that is not good for our planet and not care about our kids' future. Maybe that's it, maybe I want to give a clean earth to my children." He thinks about where food comes from, what is going to happen when food is thrown away. His kids opened up his eyes. Restaurants take up a lot of resources. He read that restaurants use up some 33% of retail energy. He sees that by feeding so many people, his restaurant goes through so much water and produces many pounds of garbage. So he's looking into composting at his restaurant because composting is now possible in Portland. Also, they filter their tap water.

Everything comes down to smart business decisions for Paul Decarli, not just short term, but in the long run too. He thinks about how his restaurant impacts the community in the long run.

How do you choose your farms? He has worked with many of them at other restaurants. Paul Decarli has built relationships with the farmers for the past 14-15 years. Aside from the relationships, his choices are also location-driven. Some purveyors will not drive to Beaverton. He also goes to the farmers markets to meet with people, although some of those farmers do not want to work with restaurants,

and instead want to stick with the public. He guesses it is the fear of the unknown. Decarli is paving the way. He feels “if you build it, they will follow.”

In order to cut costs, he tries to source out paper products, and he goes to Restaurant Depot to save money, rather than having it dropped off at his back door. This passes on some savings to his consumers. Also, he’s a chef/owner, which means he takes on a lot of work of his own.

He feels a restaurant in a cold climate would have so much more trouble sourcing locally. Maybe he would serve meat and potatoes. Portland is a great place to be to get local food. Portland has a culture of eating sustainability. The restaurant community is close: a lot of them know and communicate with each other about products and practices such as how to dispose of fry oil. More and more restaurants in Portland are buying directly from farmers, finding ways of recycling and composting. Customers at his restaurant ask about the origins of their food. Again, his green practices are customer driven. It is more expensive to get produce sustainably, but it has added benefits. His customers would rather pay a couple extra dollars to support local and eat better, but he still works at keeping his price points lower.

He and I discussed barriers to sustainability for quite some time and came up with the following. First is the higher price. Second is the quality. It is hard to find certain products, like cheeses, olive oil, salmon, etc that are local. Third is the will to search out the local/seasonal products and spend time researching and visiting farms. Fourth, his customers have to want sustainable. Finally, education can be a barrier. It is especially apparent among generations. Generational differences decide who can afford his restaurant and who lives in the suburbs. Primarily, his clients are older and moved to the suburb to raise a family. At the beginning, his clientele wanted spaghetti and meatball-type of Italian food because they were used to Italian food from places like Olive Garden. Decarli had to educate his customers. He has an older clientele (not young “hipsters”) who do not search out sustainable.

## Los Angeles

### **Mozza:**

Mozza is a corporate chain of restaurants owned by celebrity chefs Mario Batali and Nancy Silverton. They own restaurants internationally. In LA, they have three restaurants grouped together: Osteria Mozza, Pizzeria Mozza, and Mozza2Go. They employ a sustainability director in New York to green their buildings and other parts like their to-go containers. She has even managed to turn Mozza's grease waste into soap and she helped get Mozza2Go certified green. I spoke with Chef Chad Colby for Mozza2Go about sustainability in food.

Colby began by jokingly saying that the only fully sustainable part of Mozza is economical. His major role is holding small dinners on the weekends for crowds of 20-30 people, where he really pushes for sustainability. The sustainability is not just the product that he highlights, but it is also the preparation where he aims for zero waste. He will order a whole pig from Kansas and use the whole thing with just a tiny amount of waste. The pigs he chooses are raised sustainably, from Heritage Foods USA which is headquartered in New York. They are a co-op of small family farms. They only work with farms that are certified humane, and certain breeds which are heirloom breeds who are allowed to forage and are not given antibiotics. They all go to one slaughterhouse before being shipped to Mozza.

When Colby purchases food, he first looks for quality. In general, he said that organic is a better quality because people who grow organics have more passion for what they do. Yet, in the interest of having a great product, he won't look exclusively for organic. Foods like onions, celery, and carrots are hard to buy from farmers markets or organic. He never feels like he has to buy organic, but he leans towards organic as the best quality. Most farms he buys from are 4/5 miles away. There are no "backyard" sorts of farms available that he knows about. He used to

buy from the South Central farmers until they were kicked off their land and moved to Bakersfield.

Colby was matter of fact about seafood when I asked him about sustainability. He said he watched the film “End of the Line” which is about over fishing. He came away from that movie with more questions than answers. There is lots of ambiguity in buying “proper” fish, and in making a good decision. He uses the Monterey Bay Aquarium and Seafood Watch applications on his iPhone, but much of the fish that he buys in the specialty markets just are not on that list. From a professional buyer’s perspective (a chef’s perspective), it is pretty worthless in terms of buying for production. There have been a few species he has stopped buying, but the list doesn’t match up very well with his purchases. His strategy is to work with Ocean Jewels, a Los Angeles purveyor who is big on sustainability and line caught fish, but he continues to be unsure about how to buy sustainable.

We also talked about meat products as being a little easier for him to choose. After reading The Omnivore’s Dilemma, he formed some of his opinions about meat. He feels the more he reads and the closer he is to the source of his product, the better he is at sourcing sustainable ingredients and the better off people are for it and it affects a larger food chain than just one person. He knows that he would definitely rather buy a pastured chicken than one that has been grain fed. The restaurant buys an organic grain fed chicken that is local. The Mozza Group restaurants have a set menu. They are pretty corporate, with many restaurants, so they have to buy many ingredients in bulk. Sustainability isn’t always mentioned on those menus. However, Colby is lucky because he serves a smaller audience. He can bring in things that are better quality for his weekend meals.

For beef specifically, he thinks the best thing to look for is grass-fed beef. However the American palate likes the flavor better for grain fed. Colby personally enjoys the flavor of animals that are pastured a little longer, maybe 2+ years and dry aged 2-2.5 weeks. He is currently looking at buying a side or a quarter of an animal for a future meal. He has found purchasing whole animals to be a successful and the least wasteful preparation.

We talked of barriers that LA faces that are different from the ones farther north. A lot has to do with possibility and availability. Mozza has an octopus dish that is their number one seller, so they will not take it off the menu even though octopus is on the red list. He also pointed to the lack of options for local, sustainable fish. He has friends who have worked in Portland and the Bay Area. From what he has heard, it seems like farms are so close up there and easy to interact with. In Napa Valley, it seems like farms are on the doorsteps of restaurants. He said it is harder here in LA, with a different distribution channel. That is why Mozza's pork is from Kansas; it is a good quality product that he cannot find closer. He feels it is a little harder to get the food direct from farms in southern California. Also, he pointed to a difficult culture to work with that has fewer options. Some farms are close, but they do not sell to restaurants or, importantly, don't deliver to them. He guessed that maybe the reason has to do with traffic, but partly has to do with farm relations and the culture. Restaurants in other cities can directly order from farms. His option is to go to Santa Monica to pick out food from the farmers market. Overall, it seems easier in Portland from what he hears from his friend who works at Clark Lewis Restaurant.

## **Blue Hen:**

Blue Hen is a small, neighborhood Vietnamese restaurant in Eagle Rock with a focus on organic and locally procured foods. I spoke with Que Dang (pronounced “Quay”), the owner of the restaurant. While not boasting sustainability on her website or menu, she does say she supports local farms and organic farming principles.

She deliberately created a small menu because she really wanted to make sure that most of the ingredients she purchased could be found locally. That limits what she can make. Traditional Vietnamese restaurants sell lots of pork and other meats, but very little chicken. Blue Hen has mostly chicken and tofu on the menu because she can get the chicken locally and organically from Kendor Farm and because she is conscious of vegetarians. Kendor is in Van Nuys. She found them because they sell at the Hollywood farmers market. Her tofu is also organic. There are very few local tofu manufacturers, but she is happy that she can get organic tofu.

Recently she added a beef phở to her menu because customers asked for it. She decided to buy from smaller scale Niman Ranch in the Bay Area because they believe in sustainable practices. The animals are grass fed, there is no use of pesticides, no hormones, humanely treated, and it is local to California as in most of the meat stays in the state. That means that they are not using lots of gas for transporting to far away places. She does not serve fish. She already travels to the farmers market every week. Fish would have been one more stop for her, which would be an added burden for someone who buys for a small kitchen with a small menu.

She cannot find rice noodles or rice paper that is organic. She goes to an Asian market for that.

She buys greens from a local farmer who sells at the Hollywood and Silver Lake market. They are not always organic, but are always local. By local she means that they are from Fresno. Some of her produce is seasonal. For example, she has a

seasonal watermelon drink on her menu, which is available in the summer. She works with a farmer at the market to procure the melons. The same applies to some tomato specials. Only her specials change according to the season. The items that they have on the menu are generally year round except for the greens that vary a bit. The menu does not change as much as the flavors of the plates since the green onions or garlic might taste different depending on the season. “Our customers appreciate that.” Everything gets chopped slightly differently, a sign for customers to see the food is made from scratch.

Blue Hen came to be because Dang and her ex-restaurant partner really believed in organic and Vietnamese coming together. The two of them were both Vietnamese and they bought organic food for themselves. It was natural that they wanted to open a Vietnamese restaurant that served organic plates. Blue Hen was not going to be just any other Vietnamese restaurant since there were already so many in existence. Plus, the meat that was served in some other ethnic restaurants disgusted Dang. Likewise, the two women both came from social justice backgrounds and organizing. They were politically conscious about food issues.

Now, her mom is the chef of the restaurant. Dang explained that she needed to educate her mother about the prices of the food. Her mom was shocked that Dang would pay so much for food, but once she learned the reasons behind Dang’s choices she got very involved. She told her mom that we are paying another price for food that is not necessarily monetary. We are paying health prices for poor food. It may lead to sickness. Dang is running Blue Hen less for the monetary gains and more for the passion of bringing it to the community. She believes in it. She thinks people cannot always be motivated by money. She could make so much more money serving food that is not local or organic. Plus, it would be so much less work to get someone to deliver to the restaurant and she would spend less (or no) time talking to farmers. But she likes establishing the relationships with farmers and knowing where her food comes from, who is handling the food. If she wanted to make money, she could work for a corporation.

She was overwhelmed by Blue Hen at first, but was helped a great deal by friends and family. She was really supported by community-based organizations that she and her partner had worked with as well as friends in community. Basically, she had lots of free labor in the beginning because a lot of family and friends chipped in. Now Blue Hen is going into its 7th year. A simple thing like getting an eco-friendly to-go container was impossible 6 years ago. Now it's much easier. That in itself took 4 months of research, so they could avoid Styrofoam way back when. Now, going green is really popular.

We next spoke of barriers she ran into as an organic, local Vietnamese joint. Money was the first thing she thought of. People still want to pay for cheap food. She said that we grew up thinking we could pay a \$1 for a burger. Well, Blue Hen is surrounded by cheap, fast food that is competition. One of Blue Hen's entrees costs \$10. Even though people are becoming more educated about local and organic, there are still really cheap competitors, not only fast food, but cheap Vietnamese competitors who can sell the traditional Bánh mì sandwich for \$1 in Chinatown. People still can't believe how much her food costs. Engrained in people's minds is that food should cost less, that it should be cheap. The value of food is cost, not how it was made, or where it is from, or who grew it. She feels this is different from Italian-American restaurants where people readily pay higher costs for a bowl of spaghetti or a pizza. She sees Asian foods as having very low prices wherever she goes, especially Chinatown. Even so, her customers taste the difference and feel the difference in their bodies, yet still they want it to be cheaper. Again, people do not have problems paying high prices at Whole Foods, but they do for Blue Hen. Her biggest barrier is the perception of price for Vietnamese food. There is a mental barrier of cost. She is frustrated because it would be a whole lot easier for her to make a \$4 bowl of food. She goes out of her way to practice good things for the environment, but she does not see many people sharing her values.

A second barrier has to do with access. Although organic and local are becoming more popular, they are still not easily accessible to her like industrial produce is. She finds it especially difficult since she's a small business-owner. She

has to run around to get the food she really wants, driving to many markets to find the food she seeks. She picked tofu and chicken as her main ingredients because she could access them locally and/or organically. She can access farmers who sell her organic dairy, chicken, and tofu. At one point, she and her partner thought about making their own organic rice paper, but it would have been impossible and out of control, so she buys it at a market. She didn't open the restaurant until she'd done lots of research to know she could get certain ingredients that she wanted.

She defined sustainable for me, in her words. "For me, it is lowering waste for everything, products that are not only good for our bodies, but also safe for the environment. It is making sure that whatever we're producing has very little waste." There are hundreds of people going in and out of the restaurant. Sustainable is minimizing waste and consumption of anything we use. There are lots of forks and chopsticks that can potentially go in the trash. A perfect example of decreasing waste is that Blue Hen doesn't automatically put silverware in a to-go bag. They ask the customer if he/she wants it. For food, they try not to waste it. Lots of food gets thrown away in restaurants. They try to get it from local sources, trying to use all of it. For example, their day-old rice gets put in rice pudding. The same goes for their bread, which is turned into bread pudding. They try to eliminate as much waste as possible, also procuring locally and organically.

## **A.O.C Wine Bar and Restaurant:**

A.O.C, 8 years old, is one of Chef Suzanne Goin's several restaurants in Los Angeles. It is very close to the Third and Fairfax daily farmers market. A.O.C has a farm to restaurant approach to the food they serve. I spoke with her Sous Chef, Javier Espinoza. Espinoza told me that the local produce they buy is higher quality, which is why they buy from the farmers market. When he spoke of quality, he spoke of taste. But he said "we cannot be 100% sustainable because that is too expensive." I asked him to clarify and he said that ultimate sustainability would be for a restaurant to grow all of its own food on site, which he sees as impossible for A.O.C. In terms of their fish and meat, they buy it every day. Suzanne, he said, made the decision a long time ago when working with Alice Waters to buy from certain people. I asked him what they look for when they buy fish, and he said it is a no-brainer<sup>2</sup>. They look for fish that is not over-harvested. When buying meat, they look for grass-fed.

I asked him what barriers he runs into when trying to be sustainable. He repeated that it is impossible for A.O.C to grow their own food. In the same vein, he cannot grow wheat there, milk his own cows and make his own cheese at the restaurant. This seems to be a barrier of space and man-power, and maybe of knowledge. Instead, A.O.C supports sustainable farmers and purveyors. They are a farmers market-driven restaurant. Secondly, he spoke of price as a barrier. He said that it is expensive to be sustainable; he suggested that it might be less pricey for A.O.C to buy from Vons, but instead that they've created a family by buying directly from farmers. They support the farmers and in turn, the farmers support A.O.C. Thirdly, we discussed education as a barrier. It is hard for customers to fully understand why dishes cost so much. He thought this was because people do not have time to do the research.

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<sup>2</sup> Yet Erik Vance wrote an entire article detailing the difficulties. Chad Colby from Mozza also stated it was a difficult decision for him.

In the end, Espinoza defined sustainable as forming community relationships, eating seasonally, and locally. “It takes time to build these relationships.”

## **Fig Restaurant:**

Fig is a restaurant in Santa Monica, located at the Fairmont Miramar Hotel, with a clear view of the ocean. I spoke with Chef Ray Garcia who opened the restaurant. He tries to mainly get his produce from California, which is pretty easy, he said, since “we have what I consider the best produce in the world. It makes my job of sourcing locally, easy.” He shops at local farmers markets to find his produce. Certain ingredients he cannot or chooses not to get locally. He explained, “just as you can’t get a Ferrari made in the US, certain ingredients you want (like a white truffle that comes from Alba, Italy,) cannot be found in the US.” But he is happy that more and more ingredients can be found right here in California, such as olive oil, pork, beef, and some cheese. However, he did say that California offers a limited amount of cheese.

In terms of meat, he sources that from California. He also buys his fish in as close of waters as possible, though he is not stringent about buying locally. He’ll buy lobster from Maine, but will look for it when it is in season in Santa Barbara. He looks for responsibly harvested or line caught fish. He avoids fishing done in an area with a large net, or trawling, since that method picks up extras and is irresponsible. Whenever possible he buys from small fishing boats who line fish. He cannot buy fish from the market, and create a relationship as with his produce, so he works with responsible, reliable purveyors for fish. He has to trust that they buy his fish from responsible fishermen.

I asked him how he developed a restaurant that purchased sustainable foods, and he explained that it is just a byproduct of how he approaches food and cooking. It is not the main goal of Fig to be sustainable. They wanted good food which meant they needed great ingredients. There is no sense in going far when the good ingredients are here. It is automatic that he wants to support the small farmers. He has respect for what they are harvesting and producing.

We talked of barriers to his approach to sustainability. He said expense and accessibility are the two hardest. It costs him more money to buy organic or

California-grown. He has to have a commitment to get the quality he wants. He admitted that it can be less expensive at times since he's buying seasonally and he does not have to pay for transport and shipping, but there are so many shortcuts that chefs can take to get cheaper produce, like buying from Mexico, that overall he feels his costs are higher. Plus, the time it takes to shop at farmers markets is a barrier. It is not money out of his pocket, but it is his time. Ten years ago, a woman brought him fabulous mushrooms she had foraged herself. He decided to hire her because the mushrooms were so impressive. She goes all over California to find his ingredients, to forage. He has made it a priority and made a commitment to get good ingredients. He is very particular about what he wants and the quality that he wants.

I asked him how he would define the word sustainable: "harvesting something without any long-term effects from your harvest. Not leaving it worse than you found it." When Fig composts, they try to provide something that will go back into the soil, so as not to deplete resources.

## **Méllisse:**

Méllisse is an expensive French restaurant in Santa Monica that has been open since 1999. They are well known for their farm to table approach to food. I spoke with the owner and chef, Josiah Citrin.

I began by asking him why we should eat seasonally and he responded by saying that is how food is supposed to be eaten. It is best in season. This is not by chance, but it is natural. If you go back in history, chefs could not have food out of season. When he cooks, he wants ingredients at their peak. He does consider sustainability when he buys his food; taste is his primary goal. He does not serve 100% organic, but looks for food that is not sprayed. Likewise, he tries to get to know the farmer he buys from so that he always gets the best food. He does not ask how they treat their workers.

In his pursuance of the best quality, he ends up buying venison from New York. I asked him about food miles. He said that they should not matter too much. It would crush our economy to only buy locally. Anyways, a restaurant would have to import food if it was located in a cold place. He hears that the Dutch have the best restaurant and they do not exactly have a hot climate.

In choosing farms from which to purchase meat, he looks for individual, small growers. He looks for farmers who sell small amounts. He reasons, if you're producing lots of meat, you have to do unusual things to it because of the pressure to sell more, faster.

I asked about his basic barriers to being sustainable. Most importantly for him is the expense. "It all comes down to money." When I suggested that might be a priority decision, he said that it was unfair to "judge priorities" and that most high-end restaurants in LA shop at the farmers markets.

He defined sustainable for me: Sustainable is doing everything in your power to sustain the earth, in order to make sure there is something left in the ocean, on the mountains, in the parks, and that are left for next generations. It is lowering your carbon footprint. Sustainable is not easy to do in this crazy world we live in

where we have to move faster, faster. He is wary of the word. “Lots of people use it to serve promotional purposes. The word is fake everywhere.” He’s trying to do the right thing.

### **Four Café:**

Four Café opened around May 2010 right around the corner from Occidental College. This small, seasonal menu café is affordable for college students and community members. I spoke with chef and owner Michelle Wilton.

Her restaurant sounds very environmentally friendly, with reused wood to make the tables and one wall, no linens, and seasonal food, but her lifestyle does not seem sustainable as she told me she has no time for herself. Perhaps this would apply to any restaurant owner who is new to owning a restaurant and has a new restaurant. The other owners I spoke to were all much more settled than she.

She buys coffee that is Direct trade, from Jones Coffee in Guatemala, which does not cut money from the farmers since the middleman is left out. She said this is a step up from fair trade. She watches food miles closely. Her greens and herbs are purchased through Country Fresh which is near Eagle Rock, because the farm does not spray the produce. She also buys from Jaime Farms which does not spray either. She makes sure to buy as much organic as possible.

Four Cafe changes their menu every 3 months to stay within the seasons. Her beef comes from Niman Ranch and chicken from Kendor farms. She chooses local and humane over organic when buying meat. She is always in search of new vendors. She buys Albacore which is local (and presumably caught by troll, pole, and line) and Mahi for the flavor. She thinks local fish is better and she stays away from fish that are becoming extinct. They are aware of the Seals for Canada initiative so they do not buy fish from Canada. They do not buy that much meat, just enough for a little on salads and some bacon.

Wilton's main barrier to being sustainable is price. In order for her to save money, she has guests order and pay at the counter, which lowers the amount of money she has to pay for staff members. Likewise, there is no manager and no hostess. They do not use linens, so there is no linen cleaning fee. Also, she has a smaller kitchen. She aims to stay between 25%-30% for food cost, 25% for rent, 25% for staff, and hopefully make 25% in profit. She cooked this way at home, so she

wanted to share seasonal food with clients. I asked why high class restaurants cost so much more than her food. Her response was that at a fine dining establishment, they will pay for linens to be cleaned, they'll pay more for labor (bus boys, hostess, etc), and they have a higher cost of food.

It is really hard work to be seasonal, especially to change the menu every 3 months. She described it as like opening a new restaurant every time. The course descriptions all change, the staff has to be re-trained, the website must change, new recipe books must be made, she has to write new menu descriptions, and print new menus.

There are enough clients in Eagle Rock and LA who will frequent a restaurant like Four, but the owners have to really love food and be passionate to take on all the work. She sees restaurant owners as often being entrepreneurs, and less about loving food. She's trying to be different and share her love of food. The consequence is that she has no free time, nor social life, but it is slowly getting easier. She didn't know it would be so hard when she first opened. She had a huge garden in her back yard. She would cook with that produce. This is her lifestyle. She wanted to share seasonal cooking and educate people about what is in season.

How do you define sustainable? Having a low impact on the earth/environment by composting vegetable scraps, using biodegradable to-go containers, recycling appliances in kitchen, installing LED light bulbs, using reclaimed wood in the dining room. Sustainable is low energy, no pesticides, and humane care of animals. She uses compostable, potato forks, but she has to buy them from overseas. She cannot find a seller locally, but she feels it is better to have them shipped from great distances than using plastic utensils. She had to make the call.

How come more restaurants in LA aren't like Four Cafe? Wilton said that making green choices costs a lot. She also surmised that rent costs more here in LA than other cities on the west coast. Community gardens are popping up now though, which is changing the culture in LA. Additionally, as she is finding out, restaurants consume time. She values her time. LA is so spread out that it takes time to deliver

or get the food. She has found that farms do not deliver much, so she has to talk to many people at the farmers markets to try to get an order in. There is so much traffic in LA which eats up her time and growing is farther away here than say the Bay Area or Portland. It would be so much easier for her to get a delivery from a truck, but she goes to the farmers market every week because most farms she works with will not deliver to her.

## **Cube Marketplace:**

Cube serves seasonal, Italian-California cuisine on a menu that changes weekly. They are known for their extensive selection of cheese and salumi. Their website boasts organic ingredients from the Santa Monica farmers' market and meat that is raised sustainably, naturally, and with cruelty-free practices. I spoke with chef Erin Eastland as she commuted from her house to work one morning.

First of all, she “would not call Cube a sustainable restaurant by any means to go by the definition,” but they do try to use local produce. Probably 95% of their produce comes from the Santa Monica farmers market. She personally goes on Wednesday, Saturday, and sometimes Sundays to the Hollywood market. She also orders directly from farmers. LeBrass farms, for example, supply many restaurants in LA. Their menu changes on Thursdays.

Sustainable, local meat is difficult. She doesn't think it possible to have a farm in the middle of LA County. So she turns to someone outside the city to work for her. She found Harris Ranch because Whole Foods uses them. But they aren't free range etc, like she expected. Cube buys venison and wild boar from a free-roaming ranch in Texas. They try to get grass-fed when it is appropriate. By that she means, for a burger, grass-fed would be dry, so in that case they buy grain fed. Also, she reminded me that the decision has to be cost efficient. Their lamb and red meat come from Marcandos, which is a butcher at the Grove Shopping “Resort.”

She is a fan of organic, but if the product is not good, she won't buy it just for the sake of buying organic. Sometimes bugs can infest the organic food and so she'll say no. Her shopping goal is to get what will taste the best for the customer. She buys local and organic as much as possible. Mostly dairy that they use is not organic. They tried organic dairy, but the cost was way too high. It costs almost three times as much as regular milk. They use a lot of dairy so it is hard to make her cost margin.

Their fish is from Universal Seafood, which is a big vendor. They only cook with wild fish, never farm-raised. When ordering, she tries not to buy endangered

species. They also buy from Foods In Season Inc from the Northwest, particularly for the Columbia-river caught salmon and halibut. The company sells very specific products though. They also sell fiddleheads, nettles, and mushrooms. LA doesn't have an early morning fish market that she knows of to pick out fish for the day. Cube is a small restaurant. They make small batches and order frequently. In consequence, they do not produce lots of waste.

Additionally, Cube has access to their own rooftop garden at their corporate location. This is their garden's third year. The garden is solely for the restaurant and ultimately they have a goal for a non-profit seed-to-table program for underprivileged kids. When I interviewed Eastland, chicory, kale, and herbs were growing there. They were expecting tomatoes and arugula soon.

She considers Cube very lucky to have the garden. For the ingredients they do not grow, she feels there is no excuse to not choose produce from the farmers market. It is more expensive, but there is so much produce in southern California. Sometimes it is hard to find the time to go to the market, but it is so much fun to go. While it is expensive to find space for a garden, many farmers deliver to restaurants in LA. That's easy! If you have a good relationship with the farmer, they'll deliver for you. Some of them drive 4 or 5 hours to deliver, so it isn't convenient for them, but they'll have certain days they deliver, like only Tuesdays and Fridays. Also, there is a market every day of the week in LA. Restaurants must find the time to go and build the relationships with the farmers.

She wishes she could visit the farms herself, but she has a Gourmet Buyer who works for the restaurant who is into buying small batches. They celebrate small artisan makers. They look for "small people." The story behind the product is just as important as the product itself. For example, they get couscous from a place in Tunisia. Their buyer, Rachel, went there and made it with the people who grow it. They really try to support "the little guy."

When I asked Eastland to define sustainable, she said it is a restaurant which grows its own produce, that has its own farm and somehow puts waste back into a growing cycle. That's the example in her head. More people are going towards

this direction, but in cities finding the space is really difficult. A sustainable restaurant uses as much as possible and reuses as much as possible. Cube composts and sends the waste downtown to their corporate office's garden. They take it themselves because there is no compost service available to them.

## **Border Grill:**

Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken, celebrities from their TV show *Too Hot Tamales*, own Border Grill, located in downtown Los Angeles. They are members of the Chef's Collaborative which is a "national chef network that's changing the sustainable food landscape using the power of connections, education and responsible buying decisions" ([chefscollaborative.org](http://chefscollaborative.org)). They have two other restaurants in Santa Monica, and in Las Vegas, plus a food truck. The restaurant serves "upscale, modern Mexican food." I spoke with their public relations manager, Leah Ross, who was confident that her restaurant was at the forefront of a movement. Her restaurant promotes itself as being sustainable because they serve organic rice, beans, eggs, milk, and coffee, they have a tap water filter system called Natura in the restaurant, and they support several environmental groups and causes. They work with Oceana on the Stop Seafood Contamination campaign. Additionally, they do not serve Canadian seafood as part of the Humane Society's "Protect Seals" Campaign. Most relevant to their purchasing policy, they only buy seafood deemed sustainable by the Monterey Bay Aquarium. They encourage customers to try their Arctic char, black cod, and barramundi, instead of serving salmon.

Ross said it is not practical, in terms of cost, for Border Grill to be directly connected to local farms. She would have to hire someone to be the connection to the farms, which is what the distributor already does. They do not watch food miles especially when ordering items such as Peruvian liquors, because they want to keep with the theme of their food. Also, their menu remains the same throughout the year; they do not always serve food based on the local season. Their customers expect some items, like guacamole all year round, so that is what is on the menu. They use seasonal, locally grown ingredients whenever possible.

However, they have been able to switch to biodegradable food containers. They also use fair trade chocolate. They did not seek out fair trade, but found that it is the best quality. They compost in Santa Monica, because the services are in place

there. They wish they could downtown and in Vegas. Finally, they promote eating less meat, because 18% of greenhouse gas emissions come from livestock, more than from transportation! They have responded to this knowledge by designing their dishes to be made up of more vegetables than meat. They think of meat as more of a side dish. Additionally, they buy beef, lamb, and uncured pork raised without hormones and antibiotics.

Ross defined sustainable for two settings. “For me personally, I care what happens on the planet after I am not on it anymore. If I am sustainable and I influence others to be sustainable, then that will be my gift to future generations of my family and the world’s families—that they might live in a world as wonderful as I do now.

“For our company, it means we want to be able to be serving delicious fish tacos in the year 2050 and beyond because we helped educate the public about sustainable seafood. We want to get meat out of the center of the plate to help keep our hearts healthy and lessen the polluting effects of meat production. We want to create, maintain, and sustain a livable environment for our employees, our customers, our community, our country and our world.”

## Bay Area

### **Café Gratitude:**

Café Gratitude is a small chain of vegetarian restaurants in California, based in San Francisco. They sell their products in some retail stores as well. They just recently opened a restaurant in Los Angeles. Their menu consists of dishes named “I am Thriving,” “I am Dazzling,” “I am Peace,” and “I am Marvelous.” This is their 7th year of business. They make their food in a centralized location to decrease their amount of waste and it minimizes plastic wrapping. Any food waste from the preparation then goes back to their farm for compost. None of their retail products are wrapped in plastic.

I spoke with Purchasing Manager, Vinicio Penate. He estimated that about 20-25% of the produce that goes to the restaurants comes from the farm that Café Gratitude owns in Vacaville, CA which is about half way between San Francisco and Sacramento. He said that they dry or preserve what they can from the farm. When they look for farms to purchase from, they first search out biodynamic agriculture, which emphasizes the interrelationship of the ecosystem. The farmers alternate and rotate crops every year.

The idea of biodynamic farming comes from an Austrian, Dr. Rudolf Steiner, who devised, among other things, a natural way of farming. (He is more famous for Waldorf Education.) They strive to be self-sufficient in “energy, fertilizers, plants, and animals; structuring our activities based on working with nature’s rhythms,” according to the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association. They exclude the use of artificial chemicals on soil and plants. Their website explains, “biodynamic farming and gardening combines common-sense agriculture, an understanding of

ecology, and the specific environment of a given place with a new spiritual scientific approach to the concepts, principles, and practices of agriculture” (biodynamics.com).

Secondly, if they cannot find a product grown on a biodynamic farm, they search for organic produce because it tastes better and has a better conscience and spirituality. But he cautioned that “it is easier to have corruption when something is fashionable.” Thirdly, they aim for food that is in season locally. It is cheaper for them to buy seasonal food rather than out of season. They are also conscious of the energy it takes to import food and so prefer foods that come from close by. Additionally, they pay attention to fair trade products. They look for “wholesome” vendors. By that, he refers to the body, mind, and spirit. He asks farmers how much workers are paid and what the working conditions are like. As a restaurant, they pay their own workers minimum wage and they pool all the tips with everyone. Also, the employees get a 50% discount on food and wine. Employees also get medical and dental benefits. They hope this helps build a community. In amongst all their food buying, they try to buy from small, family-owned farms to help build a greater community.

Sustainable, in Penate’s words, is “choosing within a range of distance where consumed products come from. Fair trade can be sustainable but impacts the environment.”

## **Greens:**

Greens, a fine-dining vegetarian restaurant, is located in a converted warehouse in San Francisco and has been open more than 30 years. It is owned by the San Francisco Zen Center which also owns an organic farm in Marin County called Green Gulch. I spoke with long-time chef, Annie Somerville. She herself keeps mostly a vegetarian diet, but she is not absolute. We began our conversation, speaking about the recent San Francisco law that requires all homes and businesses to compost as well as the older practice of recycling. She said this law is a solution to San Francisco's dwindling landfill space.

I had just come from an interview where a chef had said he serves meat because he can help make a systemic change by encouraging sustainable meat producers. She agreed that you can make a difference serving sustainable meat, but at the same time, she pointed out that our resources are diminishing quickly. She said that it is good to take lots of meat out of our diet, plus meat is expensive. Meat uses so much water: grazing cows and processing them.

Greens gets a lot of their produce from Green Gulch farm. For their food policy, they first try to buy locally and support people they know. This is a broad goal. She believes in small growers and producers and in organic. She likes to support people who are not part of the food monopoly. She believes in these people. Plus, she reminded, me it tastes better and is fresh. Greens buys cheese from Cow Girl Creamery, which is local. She said that Greens is not 100% organic, but mostly the farms they buy from are no-spray. They use California olive oil, and some from Europe. Much of their wine is from the west coast, but also from Europe.

I then asked about barriers to being sustainable. Right away, she said there are no barriers, that it is a state of mind. She said that people have to be creative and also have to make sure the business side is sustainable. Restaurants can avoid bankruptcy by doing the job well and getting good press. Greens is fortunate to be in a liberal city with forward thinking clients. They save money and use less water and fewer chemicals by not using tablecloths on the tables. They use cloth napkins

for every meal service, but they use tablecloths only for special events. They use paper napkins at their Greens to Go counter. She explained that linens need bad chemicals to be cleaned, so Greens tries to avoid them. Also, Greens' location is very useful since the mild climate is agreeable to lots of produce. The Bay Area is a fertile place. Again, sustainable is a state of mind.

Are their prices affordable? Should affordability go with sustainability? She insisted that we have to ask ourselves where our priorities are: good food or lots of gadgets? We have lost our way in priorities and are disconnected from our food sources. To eat fairly cheaply, someone could buy greens, grains, beans, a little protein like cheese and nuts, fruits, and lots of veggies.

I asked Somerville, how do you define sustainable? For farming, it is putting something in the soil and getting something out of it. It is producing good-tasting vegetables that are good for you. It is putting in more than you take away. It is clean, with less waste. It is openness and flexibility. She explained that fewer resources are used up eating vegetables, so they are more sustainable than other sources of food. But she is not rigid about staying vegetarian.

Greens was definitely influenced by Chez Panisse. Alice Waters changed the perception about food, especially in the Bay Area—she laid the groundwork. Somerville said that if anyone says they were not influenced by Waters, they are probably just naïve. Waters has really touched so many people and changed a lot of culture.

## **Liaison Bistro:**

Liaison is a restaurant on Shattuck Ave. in Berkeley, just down the street from famed Chez Panisse. They serve French bistro-style foods and are certified Green by Alameda County. To qualify they buy only recycled-content paper and copy double-sided, clean with less toxic products, use efficient lighting systems, and conserve water with low-flow toilets and faucet aerators ([greenbiz.ca.gov](http://greenbiz.ca.gov)). I spoke with owner/chef Todd Kniess. He said they also compost and recycle all their waste. He was very vocal about his practices being economic decisions first, over any notions of sustainability. Any practices that look sustainable to the outsiders are probably costing him less, although there are a couple exceptions that his wife pushed for.

First, he tries to buy as local as possible because it is usually a cheaper product (not something I heard from many chefs). For example, he used to buy Roquefort cheese but he has switched to Point Reyes blue which is local and cheaper. This made sense, economically, to Kniess. He said that the cheese was a similar quality and that his customers still like it. It makes total sense to him to buy in season and locally. He said, “if you’re buying seasonal, local, it is also going to be cheaper.” Example: asparagus cost \$38 for 11 lbs in February. During the height of the season, it will come from Sacramento and it will be \$11. White corn, too. It is currently \$20/case, but out of season will be twice that. People can know the seasons and then make their own choices. His job is to nourish people, not to preach.

Over and over he reminded me that a restaurant is a business first. He said that he could not just make a value decision on his food, like buying all organic. The product has to be affordable. Sometimes he has to get creative, like using a less popular seafood item, but making it more friendly to the consumer. An example he gave was wild king salmon. It became very expensive and it was not available locally, so he changed to Halibut which has more recently become expensive. He has had to evolve his menu again, serving cod which is affordable, one from Alaska and

one local lingcod. He agrees that this choice is not the same as salmon, and maybe is even a bit boring, but he dresses it up with a ragu and truffle butter. Seafood is the toughest choice for him. He knows farmed fish is not advisable, so he talks to fishmongers and uses the Monterey Bay Aquarium guidelines. But he can't only follow that. He does buy farmed salmon sometimes. Salmon is only sustainable if it comes from Scotland, but then he is conscious that it has to be flown over. It is becoming hard to find a good quality, wild fish, that isn't too expensive.

We also discussed his meat decisions. He uses Niman Ranch beef and pork, Mary's Chickens from the San Joaquin Valley and their Cornish game hen. He repeated that he is in business to make money, not to make a statement and that his customers vote with their dollars. He has Steak Frites and Cassoulet on the menu, both big meat dishes. He tries to have a balanced menu of seafood, beef, some pork, and some lamb.

We talked about his location allowing him to serve certain dishes. He said that his clients are from Berkeley where people are well educated, culturally literate, and well traveled. He can serve unusual French classic dishes and they'll eat them. He agreed that a certain segment of the Berkeley population has to be politically correct, so they will eat somewhere like Café Gratitude. But the people that Liaison attracts are 50-80yrs old. They have lived there a long time. They support the arts. They are people who came to Berkeley in the '60s to do "good" and they did well for themselves while they were at it. Overall, he pointed out that no one will pay to eat in a restaurant that serves "garbage" or if it is not a good value. People do not want to pay for sustainable. People can talk about it, he said, but they do not want to spend the money. Thus, you have to be creative.

He defined sustainable for me: it is elementary. Sustainable is cooking with seasons, within the restaurant's surroundings, but not necessarily all organic. He is still on the fence about organic. It is shopping locally and keeping money in the local economy, using products that are from small, family owned places (including wineries, although corporations have their place for employing many people),

having a relationship, it is personal. He himself has 85% organic produce and meat at his family-owned restaurant.

### **Revival Bar and Kitchen:**

Revival is just a little further down Shattuck Ave. from Chez Panisse and Liaison, in Berkeley. The restaurant had only been open about 9 months when I spoke with Sous-Chef Travis McConnell. They are working on becoming Green Certified.

Revival buys all their produce from California, from Sonoma and Santa Cruz via Cooks company. He would guess they are about 80% sustainable. Their coffee is from Blue Bottle, which is fair trade. Amy, the owner, has established direct relationships with farmers over the past 20 years of working in the restaurant business in Berkeley. When buying food, they aim for organic, but they are not stringent that the food needs to be certified, as long as it is not sprayed.

They do not want to hurt the environment, but in that they do not specifically pay attention to food miles. Instead, they search out good quality in the taste of their food and to get that taste, they buy local because they know who they are buying from.

When putting wines on their menu, they include European wines, but they look for smaller companies, old-world style, more boutique-style wines. They are very local when it comes to beers though, none even from the Northwest. When he talked of cheese he said “we sell Cowgirl Creamery cheese and European kinds which is why we cannot be 100% sustainable.” This leads me to believe he equates the word sustainable with local.

McConnell had meat on his menu. I played devil’s advocate, asking if sustainable meant taking meat off the menu altogether. He responded by saying that a vegetarian menu would not encourage systemic changes. In choosing to put meat on his menu, he is careful to support local farmers and good animal husbandry. They buy from Biagio Artisan meats, a local distributor that sells them grass-fed beef.

I then asked about barriers he has run into when trying to be sustainable. He was happy that he can use olive oil from California, but aware that they do not

have a long history of making good oil like Europe. Price can be a barrier. Quality (finding good products nearby) can be another, although it is getting better! The support system, such as the clients, can be a barrier, but he said he is lucky that Revival is in Berkeley. He could not see success in Arkansas, a state where he used to work. In Berkeley, his ideas do not feel like liberal or elitist. Thus, location can be a barrier. Berkeley is again lucky because there are farms close by. Overall, he commented that the general attitude of the country needs to change. People need to make the choice to have good food on their plate! He sees strong waves in some places. The new generations are supporting the movement, making choices and taking on responsibility.

I finished by talking to him about affordability of sustainable food. He explained that there are hidden costs like healthcare that are not in the calculation of the price of food. The true cost of sustainable is not as high because there are fewer detrimental costs. We have to be more dedicated to food and make choices. It does not have to be difficult. We could start by freezing food for ease, but not using cans which seep chemicals into food. He suggests people try going fresh when cooking at home—start with small steps like an herb garden on your porch.

## **Tataki Sushi and Sake Bar:**

Tataki, located in San Francisco, is one of five sustainable sushi restaurants in the country. Their mission is “to showcase the beauty and delicacy of Japanese cuisine while respecting the sanctity and fragility of our environment. If we are to preserve the art of sushi, we must also safeguard the health and biodiversity of our oceans. With this in mind, we strive everyday to integrate the concept of sustainable dining into our menu options.” (tatakisushibar.com).

I spoke with Casson Trenor, the “Sustainability Guru” for the restaurant who wrote the book *Sustainable Sushi: A Guide to Saving the Oceans One Bite at a Time*. He writes that the word sustainable was first introduced in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (un-documents.net) He explains that the word has “taken on any number of meanings, many of which are competing and contradictory” (Trenor, xii). In his book, he uses a definition of sustainable from Webster’s Dictionary: “of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged.” It takes three concepts into account: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and social sustainability.

For seafood, he is concerned with environmental sustainability. He asks “How was this fish caught or raised? Is it intrinsically a vulnerable species [...]? Are we over fishing the stock? Does a given fish farm pollute or have adverse effects on the environment? Does the manner in which we are catching a particular fish harm other species? Does a given fishery negatively impact the earth or the oceans, or our future ability to catch this fish?” (Trenor, xii). Economic sustainability has to do with employment that is connected to resources. Social sustainability, he writes has to do with “the people involved in the trade as well as their history and culture” (xiii).

One of my first questions for him was why shouldn’t we just stop eating fish to be sustainable? He was ready for my question. He explained that there are many

people on the planet. About one billion people depend on fish as their protein. It is dehumanizing to say we should just stop eating fish because you're saying some people do not deserve to eat. People need protein. The US isn't nearly as dependent compared to somewhere like Indonesia, but there still are fishermen who depend on fish to make money. We won't get anywhere if we approach the issue from the angle that we don't need to eat fish. Instead, we need to suggest a way forward. We need to promote change. It might be a good thing if everyone was vegan, but he feels he will not get anywhere with that argument. So, he leverages people's attachment to, their desire for, fish instead of fighting that demand. People have a strong connection to the ocean through their mouths.

The main part of eating sustainable seafood is eating lower down on the food chain. He continued that Tataki has the most developed vegetarian sushi menu in town which is doing a lot for the ocean. They opened Tataki without the 5 most popular fish on their menu: farmed salmon, eel, farmed shrimp, Bluefin or Yellowfin Tuna, or Hamachi. Bluefin Tuna in particular is vastly over fished, so they stay away from that. They still serve a lot of fish though. Every time they take a fish off the menu, they replace it with something else that tastes great. Also, they don't buy food that is jetted over to them. Tataki's fish is frozen and sent on a ship (Trenor mentioned that people are often unaware that fresh fish is often toxic until frozen and that frozen fish is still great quality). He said that merchants need to stop playing on the misunderstandings around sustainable. The majority of their fish is domestic. Beef, compared to fish, is a major carbon draw, and not a very efficient way of getting our protein. Tataki does have one beef piece on the menu, a dish with beef on top of a rice and seaweed wrap. For that, they use a local beef from Marin County.

Their fish comes from many different places, from several distributors, and several merchants. They source from as close as California, but also from New Zealand and Japan. He said that when you open up a restaurant with a mission and you're the first to do it, you need priorities. Their goal was to have conceptual proof to say that such a thing was possible. People thought they were crazy. But they

knew they weren't, well, they hoped they weren't. They really wanted to open up the door to the movement. They want to be avant-garde, but not a niche, so that other people can follow them. They wanted to prove the concept by only selling seafood from sustainable sources, to prove that a menu can be built around fish that is only caught in a sustainable way. He agrees that they incur carbon by transporting their fish to San Francisco, but no more than another sushi place. They will first take the fish from a rowboat in Mozambique over big a trawler in California. They hope they are moving forward with the idea and that other restaurants now have Tataki as a model. One restaurant is not going to save sushi. The next restaurant can work on carbon, caloric intake, organic vegetables, sustainably raised pork, etc. Trenor views it as a communal project. That is the beauty of sustainable sushi. Each restaurant does it a little differently, bringing their own goals.

Next we spoke of Tataki's produce decisions. Sustainable produce is not his forte. He said that they pay attention to fair trade, organic, local, seasonal, but that each label has a level on their priority list. Some are more important than others. They have to maintain their 100% commitment to sustainable seafood first. They work on their vegetables as their number two priority. Certain items like shizo leaf and wasabi are a challenge to get organically. Yet, about 70-80% of the produce on their menu is organic. He estimates that about 90% is from California. Yet, Tataki does not advertise this because they're not ready to have this discussion with customers. Organic is expensive, but they have to deal with that. Non-organic is not okay after a certain point. Some items are more important to be organic than others, like strawberries that contain a lot of pesticides. It depends on your priorities, he repeated. Their bottom line is not just numbers. They'll stick to their priorities even if they do not make money on a certain dish. Every restaurateur is going to have different priorities. Tataki makes certain choices about what they sell and how they sell it.

There are only five sustainable sushi restaurants in the country. He works with four of them. Sustainable sushi is a challenge, but it is not as hard as you might think, he told me. It's more and more likely that he could have a similar

sushi place in a less forward thinking place. If you can do it in Boise (the newest member of the 5), you can do it anywhere. There are two Tatakis in San Francisco, Bamboo is in Portland, Mashiko in Seattle, Miya in Connecticut, and Simple in Idaho.

Our modern food system does not take environmental justice into account. It is set up to push environmental externalities off and not include them in the price. Now it is hard to take them into account. There is no tax break for selling sustainable sushi.

If sustainability had to be for the rich, then it wouldn't be sustainable. Sushi is already a luxury item though, so it does cost a little more money. He finished saying that sushi that isn't sustainable can be still more expensive than Tataki. Tataki is one of the top five sushi restaurants in the Bay Area and is the cheapest.

## **Chez Panisse:**

An icon of the sustainable, local food movement is Alice Waters' restaurant Chez Panisse, in Berkeley. Kristi Peters Snider wrote in her dissertation, "Waters pioneered ingredient-driven restaurants and seasonal cuisine and initiated a movement linking local farmers and chefs across North America" (Peters Snider, p. 6). Thomas McNamee's biography about Waters details the story of how she built the local food movement based on her dream to serve delicious food to her friends. She understood that the taste of dishes comes from good ingredients and she found that the best ingredients are local and in season, at the peak of ripeness. Author of *Earth to Table: Seasonal Recipes from an Organic Farm*, Jeff Crump explains, "the desire for food grown and prepared with care is not elitist or limited to a band of hippies. It's what we all want" (1). He points out that even French fries should be seasonal in restaurants as potatoes are not at their best between January and March. Chez Panisse is considered by some to be the pioneer for sustainable restaurants. There, they have ties with more than 75 local farmers, they cook what is in season that is never sprayed with pesticides, and they also treat their workers very well, paying a living wage (18% tips), giving them benefits, and health care (McNamee, 241). This is perhaps one of the reasons Chez Panisse has lasted for 40 years.

I spoke with the owner, Alice Waters, on the phone in March. I asked, does sustainable resonate with you as a good term? She doesn't know other terms that make more sense. Ecologically sound, sustainable—she is not sure what those words are. The definition definitely has to do with a right set of values, has to do with wholesome, and delicious, pure, supporting a community of people. It's about an idealistic picture of how we want to live on this planet together.

She decided to start a Twitter account the day I spoke with her, to connect with people in a much more democratic way, to connect up all that we're learning about food. Her first tweet is "The destiny of nations depends on how we nourish ourselves." The way you eat determines your values and the way you think. It's so

important that we bring the next generation up on real food and bring them to the table. They can help us solve our problems. Eating fast food three times a day shows you have values of bad food that just wash over you. You think it's okay to waste and that there is always more where that came from. It is the kind of thinking that portrays kitchen work as drudgery and shouldn't be paid. It is very corrosive, that kind of thinking. It nearly annihilated the culture of this country. We need to eat with intention, to give our money to the people who are taking care of the people who take care of the land. We need to pay our money to people who are thinking about future generations, who care about eating at the table, who care about feeding all the people on the planet. That's another kind of thinking. It comes from a reverence for food and for the people who produce it.

She supports the ideas of Slow Food, which include clean and fair, include who those farmers are, and your employees. The ideas do not just encompass organic and biodynamic farming techniques. She is interested in all the parts—how they get the food to the market, how they package the food, all of those types of ecological considerations, how they live their lives. She or someone from Chez Panisse will visit the farms to see how things work and they will make a report on it. They become partners with the farmers. Or, as Slow Food puts it, “Co-producers.” They want to feel like the farmers are really part of the restaurant, just not providing the goods, but almost as if they were part of the staff of the restaurant. And she is always trying to get better at this.

She'd like every single solid thing at the restaurant to be produced in a sustainable way, from the salt to the vanilla beans, to organic cotton for the table clothes... She picked her fish purveyor, Paul Johnson, because he worked for Waters a long time ago and she encouraged him to open his own business. She knows he's an incredibly principled person. She knows what they get is more local and more from small fishermen, as opposed to some of the things that he buys. He is always thinking and educating himself about global fish. The concept is so complicated! It makes organic farming seem like a clear road map, but when you're talking about the air and the water, it is complicated. We are all trying to find our

way without hurting the people we care about. She had a falling out with Niman Ranch a while ago when she just wanted grass fed beef, but they weren't willing to do it or to feed the hogs organic feed. That was bottom line for her, so she changed suppliers. Fortunately, Bill Niman is now producing something wonderful. Now, she is happy that they are doing it. Sustainability at Chez Panisse is always a work in progress and a goal out there.

Has your understanding of the word sustainable changed? She doesn't know where the word came from; she feels that it sort of came from the organic farming movement, from the idea that you put back what you take out. We should really give back. Our thinking should go to giving back, using small amount and giving back more. We have to think about our children's children. We have taken so much without any consideration. Now it is time to change a way of thinking. Instead of accumulating money, we have to give it away. We need to teach our kids to be philanthropists.

What has changed in your sustainability model today? She used to have one forager who did the work of writing about the farms and ranches, and bringing back the information to the chefs and everyone. Now, everybody is involved in that foraging. All the chefs are engaged in different ways. They are looking at ingredients and evaluating them. Her current big mission has to do with chickens. It is very hard to find an organically fed, free-range, pasture-raised chicken that doesn't cost \$30 or \$40. There is the question of feed, transport of feed, price of feed. Lots of organic feed comes from China. We're trying to figure out about how it could be brought in from local farms in small quantities, and mixed. Michael Pollan told her that chickens cost more to raise than cattle. It will be difficult convincing the public that chickens should be more expensive and eaten less than steak. That is how it used to be. The chickens actually cost more than cattle, fed organic feed and free range, cost more than cattle. She had no idea until Pollan informed her about two months ago. Again, it shows you how upside down these things are. We're completely uneducated about our food. That's the beautiful thing that's happening

right now. We're taking a crash course as a nation. We're starting with the poisons, but we'll get to the good stuff eventually.

When did you explicitly define yourself as an environmental advocate? "Maybe about 15 years into the restaurant." Organic had a bad name back then. She was unwilling to put that on the menu, but then she realized it was pretty important to be on the menu. She realized that it needed more than being put on the menu, it needed to be shouted out, so we could take care of these farmers. Organic was associated with overpriced, bad looking vegetables, and with health stores. The stereotype came from the '50s and '60s when people were growing it right but not relating it to gastronomy. She was afraid to shout it out at first.

What do you define as the core contribution you've made to restaurants? She'd like to say she's uncompromising, but that is not true. They are a place that holds the bar really high. They try to hold onto that.

Is there a core element you'd want to communicate to other restaurants who want to pursue a sustainable model? "Write down a mission statement: where are you going, what are you talking about in terms of the running of the restaurant as a whole, treatment of the staff, the food, the equipment. Ask, where are you spending your money, where are your priorities? Why are you in the restaurant business? Are you spending all your money on the décor and not on the people? Try to write that down. What are you hoping to accomplish? Think about the big picture and also your own life in the restaurant. How does that relate to the big picture of the world? It is sort of impossible to be an island unto yourself these days." After 25 years of Chez Panisse, she had an epiphany that education is going to save us. That was why she started the foundation, and started the Edible School Yard.

## Ithaca, NY

### **Moosewood:**

Moosewood Restaurant in Ithaca, New York, is unusual for this report because the restaurant is not located on the west coast. However, considering they have managed to be open, and sustain themselves for 38 years, they are another good example of sustainable. Moosewood, a vegetarian cooperative owned by 18 members, has published many cookbooks. I sat down with one of the owners, Dave Dietrich.

Buying sustainable food is a little hard to sort out from the economics of it. They cannot just ignore prices. There are certain realities of the restaurant that constrict them. They try very hard to be an accessible restaurant. They are located in downtown Ithaca, where people want to be able to afford to just have lunch. They do not want to price people out of coming. Dietrich was not pointing at anybody, but said that some vegan or all-organic restaurants can be very expensive. He is not sure if such a restaurant could exist in the Finger Lakes district of New York. Affordability is another aspect of social involvement and social commitment. They do not want the concept of Moosewood to be accessible only to an upper class.

Having said that, Dietrich told me they have always sought to start with whole foods, not processed. This means, they will start with the whole potatoes instead of pre-peeled and diced, for example. They could save time starting with the pre-peeled potatoes, but they don't want that. Their most important priority is avoiding processed foods because they rob people of nutrition, and they bathe in chemicals. Moosewood chefs are aware of the ingredient lists on the products they buy.

A surprise for many people walking into Moosewood is that they are not completely vegetarian. In early the moments of the restaurant, they even served

chicken. Now they include a fish item on their set menu. Proteins often present a problem when trying to be sustainable. Some fish is contaminated with mercury. There is over-fishing in the wild. Some fish are better for you than other fish. So they searched for better things, especially to avoid over-fished populations. They tried farmed fish. Then information came out about farmed fish, that the ponds were not clean, effluents, the feed was made of corn... Their current solution is to buy Jail Island Salmon from a farm. This farm is fenced off in open ocean. There are reasons this farm is thought to be more sustainable, because the fish aren't just in a holding pen. They are still in open waters, but they're contained. Sometimes Moosewood uses line-caught fish, including Haddock and Cod. The owners have an on-going debate whether or not to keep serving fish. Some suggest maybe switching to free range chicken. The fish dishes are very popular, from a business perspective. For a number of reasons, they have helped keep the restaurant a viable business, and kept people attracted to it. They do not want to be exclusive to vegetarians. It helps parties of people who aren't all vegetarians. It is important to them that the meals could be social events, not pretentious. Including a non-vegetarian option means that a family does not split up when one person wants to eat at Moosewood but not everyone is vegetarian. The way people eat has "kind of disintegrated lately."

Moosewood is conscious of what it takes to get the food they want to the restaurant. Some things we still get "are ridiculous." They avoid food flown to them. Most produce is US-grown. Getting local food is a challenge because of the cold weather. Ithaca has a short growing season, which makes buying really local produce difficult during most of the year. In the winter, their produce comes from the south and west. There are times when they can get regionally local food, from nearby Pennsylvania. Yet, their county is fairly affluent, with many socially involved people, and a local farmers group called the Finger Lakes Organic Growers that act as a distributor. There are a lot of CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) sold in Ithaca. Around the first of April, they can switch to produce that is fairly local. They can get a lot of greens, kale, collards, and winter squashes.

Sometimes Moosewood buys directly from farmers. For example, there is a farm 6 miles north of there. It is a challenge to get local produce. Frost-sensitive plants cannot be planted until June 1st.

Their solution is to buy locally when they can in order to support the local businesses. They want to encourage them, to make their endeavors successful. The other reason to buy local is that they know the farmers, so they know the safety of the food. There's something about face-to-face relationships that feel more secure. Also, they don't have to put a lot of energy and money into transporting the food. Plus, they are sure of the freshness of the food.

They compost all their veggie scraps. It goes to the Cayuga Nature center. They compost it and sell it as organic compost.

Moosewood came into being in 1973, a time when vegetarianism was just flourishing and they wrote one of the most influential vegetarian cookbooks. Mollie Katzen, one of the founding members, was very influential. Many people in the US became vegetarian due to her influence. She made vegetarianism tasty and appealing. Dietrich finds it very exciting to think that Moosewood has contributed to the concept, even with the criticism that they are not pure vegetarians. They have continued writing cookbooks since Mollie's first book. Some recipes have changed over time. Not all their recipes were super healthy back then (they used a lot of cheese).

Moosewood decided to open as a vegetarian restaurant, in part because of the influence from the book Diet for a Small Planet by Frances Lappé. Vegetarianism was thought to be both healthier for you and it avoided the meat-based agriculture that used up a great deal of resources. Meat-based agriculture used (and still does) lots of space and energy. The idea was that vegetarians could skip the meat and save those resources. The word "sustainable" was "probably not used" at that time. Perhaps an earlier word was ecological, or ecologically beneficial. Dietrich felt they were different words but for the same idea. The word was explaining that the food production industry at the time could not continue in that way without being destructive. Shifting to a vegetarian diet would be more sustainable. The movement

wasn't just sustainable agriculture. It was also opposing the wasteful use of petrochemicals, opposing nuclear fuel, opposing overdevelopment, etc. All those ideas were grouped under the ecology movement. "It is all semantics in some ways, these things happen." He sees some division now. He does not know if there is one good word to use.

Yes, he feels the word sustainable is a good term to use. Moosewood is famously collectively owned. Although there is no legal definition for a collective in New York, it is more the spirit of it. Most people who opened Moosewood were part of the Back to the Land movement in the 1970s. At the time, people wanted to live off the land. The spirit was trying to find a more ecological way of living. It is very much in Moosewood's spirit. They would do a great deal more if it were possible. Most owners are gardeners who deeply understand the short growing season of upstate New York. Local and organic produce can be difficult to get.

I asked Dietrich to define sustainable for me. His personal thought is that sustainable has to be involved in some way with making decisions to have a simpler life and to accept less. Economically, humans gobble up a huge amount of the earth, for things that really are not necessary. We also use so many resources for recreation, for entertainment, for things that could be done without. He thinks a sustainable lifestyle means making other choices, maybe, rather than accepting less. We don't have to have a big car, do not have to hop a jet casually; we should try to keep the amount of driving to a minimum. At Moosewood, it never felt like a hardship. People feel entitled to do what they want. It's a complicated thing. Moosewood takes a general direction toward sustainability. Some members are strict vegetarians or vegans, but not the majority of the members.

Dietrich would define sustainable against its opposite. A lot of people are afraid of how unsustainable we are. Infinite growth is not sustainable. The system is going to crash eventually. Someone once told him that "only two things seek infinite growth: capitalism and cancer cells." To create a sustainable cultural system, you have to examine the dangers of that endless growth. We cannot keep growing beef in CAFOs. We'll run out of resources to sustain the system.

Sustainable wants to produce a healthy world with healthy people living in it. Sometimes words take on their own meanings when they are used a lot, but sustainable means just that.

I finished by asking him if there was a core element he would want to communicate to other restaurant owners who want to pursue a sustainable model. Sometimes he thinks Moosewood is unique because of their demographic. Farther away from Ithaca there are more options. An owner can create an upscale vegan restaurant like Millennium in San Francisco. He'd say to carefully construct what's going to be the guiding ideals for the restaurant, making it clear what you're doing and stick to it. That being said, he explained that Moosewood has never been successful at verbally creating a mission statement despite trying, but in some intuitive way, the members know what it is and live by it. Every once in a while, they will try to write it down, but it is never completely satisfying. He suggests an owner decide on core values and stick with them.

## CHART OF RESULTS

The following chart tries to give the reader the information from the narratives in a more concise manner. An X represents the restaurant buying that type of food. If the restaurant does not have an X, it probably does not watch for the idea, such as grass-fed meat, but it may be that the topic did not come up in our conversation. “N/a” stands for not applicable, generally because the restaurant was vegetarian, so bought no meat.

	Local	No spray/org	Humane treatment animals	Attn to communities	Fair trade	Compost	Grass-fed	Wild fish	Know food source
Higgins	X	X				X		X	X
Burgerville	X		X	X		X			X
Andina	X	X		X			X	X	X
Papa Haydn	X	X					X	X	X
Paley’s Place	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
DeCarli	X	X	X	X				X	X
Liaison	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
Revival	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Greens	X	X	n/a	X		X	n/a	n/a	X
Tataki	X	X				X	n/a	X	
Chez Panisse	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
Café Gratitude	X	X			X	X	n/a	n/a	X
Mozza	X	X					X		X
A.O.C	X								X
Four Café	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
Mélisse	X	X							X
Fig	X	X				X			
Cube	X	X				X	X	X	X
Blue Hen	X	X	X				X	n/a	X
Border Grill	X	X	X			X		X	
Moosewood	X		n/a	X		X	n/a		



## CONCLUSION

Many unsustainable aspects of the current food system exist, such as food miles; pesticide use; unhealthy, confined living arrangements for animals with detrimental effects to the earth and to the animals; depletion of nutrition via monocropping; compromised food security, and more. Restaurants play a role in encouraging customer preferences and directing money to sustainable causes. In this research, I have laid out 21 models for sustainability in restaurants. Each kind of food (produce, meat, fish, etc.) has its own criteria, and often causes controversy or confusion.

“Sustainable” fish causes problems for many people as it is such a confusing topic. Many chefs I spoke with were perplexed by the array of choices. However, from the expertise of Erik Vance, journalist for San Francisco Magazine, from the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch, and from Casson Trenor of Tataki, I began to understand the issues better. One important issue related to fishing is bycatch. When fishermen pull in more than just the species they want to sell, often they will toss out what was accidentally caught at the same time. Trawling is a method that is infamous for huge numbers of bycatch. Likewise, long-lining is not a good method because the fishermen cannot control which species bite their miles-long lines. Turtles, sharks, birds, and other animals will bite the hooks and die from starvation or bleed to death before they are roped back into the ship. Restaurants should avoid fish caught by trawlers or long-lining, and should instead seek hook-and-reel caught fish. They should also try to buy wild fish from a robust population. The Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch lays out guidelines for many fish species and they can provide help to restaurants to design fish dishes that include sustainable fishes.

Meat is another complex issue, but one with which chefs have more familiarity. Several had read Michael Pollan’s book, The Omnivore’s Dilemma. Pollan posits that grain fed beef is not sustainable, and that pasture-raised, free-range animals are healthier for our bodies and for the environment. Many chefs

owners bought meat that was raised within their state, which had the benefit of being local, to reduce food miles. Buying locally also meant that the chefs knew the farmers and knew how the animals were treated. Several chefs such as Erica Holland Toll paid attention to the stewardship of the land where the animals were raised. The majority of the restaurant owners knew the farmers they sourced from: Paley's, Papa Haydn, Higgins, Decarli, Blue Hen, A.O.C, Four Café, Cube, Greens, Revival, Chez Panisse, and Moosewood.

Produce seemed like the simplest of these three food groups. When a chef buys locally, the produce is the most fresh, and will be in season, and therefore will be at peak flavor and ripeness. As with the meat, the chef can then know the farmer, and know what the practices on the farm are like. Almost all chefs looked for produce that was either organic or not sprayed by chemicals. They knew that many farmers do not have the resources to be labeled organic. Many chefs decided to support smaller farms that were close to their kitchen.

Todd Kniess of Liaison was adamant that a restaurant could focus on the economics of the restaurant and still profit while being sustainable. He does not work tirelessly to buy food from the closest source possible, but he does end up buying much local, seasonal food that is organic and thereby saves himself money. He will also buy cheaper, lesser known wild fish that is not over-harvested and make it appealing to people who may have never heard of the species. Of course, a restaurant should be able to make money and it may not be economically feasible to buy all organic. Each restaurant will have to make that business decision. A restaurant is a business first, but can have environmentally oriented priorities.

I suggest there is no single definition of sustainable because the word is broad and vague. Many people I interviewed struggled to clearly define the idea. Both Vitaly Paley of Paley's Place and Dave Dietrich from Moosewood said they would define sustainable by what it is not, by the opposite of sustainable, but even that is hard to precisely nail down. Sustainable should be a lifestyle as well as a goal at a restaurant. It should not consume the entirety of one's free time; it should be manageable. Paley uses the word to explain his choice to buy as local as he

possibly can for as many ingredients as are available. I was told many times that sustainable means no pesticides used, buying direct from a farm (including receiving a delivery, or shopping at the farmers market), ordering from within 100 miles, or within the state, purchasing food that is in season, following fair trade principles, treating animals humanely, and other criteria utilized by particular restaurants.

In my conversations, I teased out an idea of a definition from the chefs and restaurant owners I spoke with. Some, like Que of Blue Hen, felt that sustainable means doing the right thing. This school of thought leans towards treating animals humanely and allowing them live on a pasture, eating grass (Mozza). Alice Waters of Chez Panisse said very clearly that sustainable has to do with a right set of values, which includes eating wholesome food, being tied to a local community, eating organic, and being fair. Annie Somerville of Greens agreed that sustainable is a state of mind.

Others put forth the idea that sustainable was “not leaving the environment worse than you found it” (Ray Garcia of Fig). To achieve this, many said it means eating locally, seasonally and organically by shopping at farmers markets. Several restaurants (Moosewood, Café Gratitude, Greens, Cube, Mozza, Blue Hen) included decreasing (or producing less) waste in that definition. Restaurants also suggested that eating less meat or no meat was a part of being sustainable, by using fewer resources. Michelle Wilton (Four Café) described the idea of sustainable as having a low impact on the earth. Similarly, Dietrich at Moosewood explained that choosing a simpler life was tied to being sustainable. Finally, Mélisse, Decarli, and Burgerville all emphasized that leaving the environment the same or better than before had to do with thinking of the next generations’ fate.

Peter Platt from Andina was adamant that sustainable is more than sourcing locally. It means creating a direct, meaningful, fair relationship with the people who sell him food. He explained that sustainable means making connections; it means bringing people together through direct trade. He suggested we should move beyond this problematic term, instead, promoting long-term relationships and connections

that do not degrade the environment or affect health, and that also take into account our impact on human communities.

Michael Gibbons of Papa Haydn argued that sustainable is a hugely complex issue that should not be summed up by one word. Instead, he felt we should focus on minimizing our carbon footprint or decreasing our energy consumption. Not everyone I spoke with agreed. Some felt that sustainability was a word they could identify to sum up certain issues. Perhaps “sustainable” is not the most precise term to encompass this many issues, but the fact is it is used.

Overall, sustainability is a very complex issue. A skeptic might object that a word that means so many things to so many different people is becoming meaningless or at least ambiguous. In response, I point to the fact that there was nearly complete agreement among those interviewed that "sustainability" had three core elements: buying locally, buying organic and buying from someone you know. After that, views diverged, some people arguing that it is important to concentrate on human relationships, others on how animals are treated. Possibly the most surprising finding in this study is that the two people who have been into "sustainability" the longest, Dave Dietrich of Moosewood and Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, both agreed that one of the most important elements in a sustainable restaurant is to figure out what you're doing and then to write it down. They each separately told me that a new owner should think about how to treat the workers, where to buy food, and how to decide on priorities. Perhaps we hear in these statements the experience of people who have lived through continuing arguments about whether sustainable should be more about how animals are treated or about human relationships? Will the term “sustainability” continue to be used by restaurants? Will the models described here be among those that succeed? Will a new and more strictly defined term emerge, something along the lines of the A.O.C. designation in cheese and wine (Ritchie)? One thing ultimately is very clear: restaurants are in a good position to do their part to help move people towards a better way of eating and of being in the world.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

I am unsure how to include the explosion of ethnic restaurants in Los Angeles. For the most part, they do not use the word sustainable on their menu or on their website, but I do not want to ignore these restaurants. In my research, I found that sustainable does not always have to do with environmental practices, that the word encompasses community and relationships. Though I did not study these ethnic restaurants specifically, I surmise that they are culturally appropriate to the people who live in LA, and that they sustain the people who live in the city.

Additionally, I approached my research from a white female's perspective and I interviewed a majority of white males. I am conscious that I may have missed a definition of sustainable by a minority population. Julie Guthman, a professor at UC Santa Cruz explains that the dominant, white view of sustainable does not always apply to minorities (432). She suggests that "more attention to cultural politics of alternative food might enable whites to be more effective allies in anti-racist struggles" (Guthman 431). Further research should be done to make up for this gap.

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