

## Building a Local Certification for Green Restaurants

The Green Restaurant Research Team (GRRT) is a partnership of the University of Chicago's [Program on Global Environment](#) and [Environment, Agriculture and Food Group](#), the [Green Chicago Restaurant Coalition](#) (GCRC) and [Green Seal](#). The team was comprised to foster student engagement through the development of a Chicago-based green restaurant certification, which would align restaurant business interests with local environmental priorities and sustainability goals.

Students from environmental studies, public policy and economics evaluated Green Seal's GS-46 (Standard for Restaurants and Food Services) using scholarly literature, expert interviews and surveys of Chicago restaurant owners and consumers. The students worked closely with Chicago's leaders in food service sustainability including [Sopprafina](#), [Uncommon Ground](#), [Frontera Grill](#), [Goose Island Brewery](#), [Shedd Aquarium](#), [Slagel Family Farm](#) and others.

Some highlights of the GRRT findings include:

- In spite of significant seasonal constraints, there was strong support and a growing market for “local” and “sustainably-produced” foods in Chicago.
- A survey of Chicago consumers showed the strongest preference for local foods and recycling but less knowledge about other green restaurant practices.
- Water conservation and stormwater management are high priority in Chicago.
- Increasing renewable energy use is challenging but energy efficiency is widespread.
- Composting infrastructure in Chicago needs to catch up to the use of compostable products.
- Local food service and environmental policies should be aligned to promote green restaurant practices through community engagement.

Green Seal developed the GS-46 based on life-cycle research that concluded that over 95% of the environmental impact from the day-to-day operations of a food service business comes from the food purchased and used. Working with the GCRC and the University of Chicago, Green Seal is applying the GS-46 framework to develop an environmental leadership standard for restaurants in the Chicago area.

Green Seal is currently researching and developing criteria that address the GRRT findings. This includes considering local food procurement, storm water management, and community engagement. At the same time that new criteria are being developed, Green Seal is working with the GCRC and the GRRT to determine the feasibility of these updated criteria. The result of this project is to create a Pilot Chicago Green Restaurant Standard which will be used to certify and recognize Chicago restaurants that have demonstrated environmental leadership in their operations.

*A longer version of this post can be found along with the GRRT resources and report can be found at [eaf.uchicago.edu](http://eaf.uchicago.edu).*