

Running a Sustainable Food Business
By Mary Cleaver, Owner, The Cleaver Co.

To me, great food means local, seasonal food, and knowing the people who grew or raised it. During more than thirty five years in the food business, my inherent understanding of the superior quality of local food has become an emphatic and politicized mission to support healthy, regional agriculture and cuisine. Today, our business includes a catering and event planning company, a full service farm to table restaurant and seasonal kiosks at The Battery in Lower Manhattan. Our social mission across all three arms of the business is to support a regional farm and food economy that fosters a pure food supply.

This starts with where our food comes from: we source the best ingredients to create healthy, beautiful, sumptuous and regionally-focused seasonal fare with inspiration drawn from many different cuisines of the world. Our organic raw materials come from local family farms, producers and fisheries, and are fished and farmed using ecologically healthy practices. In order to make this happen, we work directly with dozens of farmers, as well as with several thoughtful distributors who work to get the best local food from the Hudson Valley, Long Island, the Finger Lakes, New Jersey and Vermont into the New York City marketplace. We also source at Greenmarket, New York City's farmers' market system. Three years ago, my husband and I took the ultimate leap and bought land in Washington County, NY – this summer will be our third season raising produce, poultry and flowers at Green Table Farm.

But where food comes from is only the beginning. We believe true sustainability in the catering and restaurant world is also about where food goes – the whole food cycle from farm to post-plate. Our sustainability practices include:

- Composting and recycling in our kitchen and at every event
- Use of china and glassware whenever possible, and compostable serve ware when it's not (no plastics or disposables are used)
- Recycling of cooking oils
- Use of environmentally-friendly cleaning products and recycled paper products
- We serve New York City tap water – one of our finest natural resources! We use an in-house purifying/carbonation system and eliminated shipped bottled water from our operation.

We recently bridged our devotion to the Good Food Movement with the Good Business Movement and became a Certified B Corporation – the first full service event planning/catering company and restaurant in New York City to do so. B Lab's courageous effort to change the business paradigm in this country – from a capitalist model focused only on growth, to one that heralds capitalism with values, and nurtures a triple bottom line – resonates deeply with me, because I run my business with people, planet and profit in mind. B Corporations are companies that believe in using the power of business to solve social and environmental problems, and meet higher standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.

There is a lot of work to be done to move away from our current industrialized, processed food system, and toward a system that is healthier for people and for our planet. But I am hopeful we can do it. The way we do business – and spend our money – can change the world.

The Cleaver Co. was named 2015 Green Business of the Year by the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce.