

Green Tracker Spotlight on GustOrganics

On a bitter cold December afternoon, a group convened at a communal table in GustOrganics, the first totally certified organic restaurant in the country. The restaurant owner, Alberto Gonzales, greeted everyone congenially offering a full meal on the house. After settling in, Global Energy Efficiency (GEE) began their presentation entitled "GustOrganics -- Financial Cost and Savings for Energy Efficient Measures." Alberto fell silent. Listening intently, he flipped through the report bearing a stoic expression.

After the last section of the report was presented, Alberto asked speculatively, "Is this figure here the bottom line?" With the answer yes, he turned to Alan with a broad smile exclaiming, "All the others who came before you just talk and talk. Then they throw you some paperwork and nothing ever happens-- but not you. You're actually doing something for us!"

Alberto's reaction was well received by Alan Someck, the founder & program director of the Greener Hospitality Initiative. As a former restaurateur himself, Alan knows how difficult it is to keep up with the day to day rigors of running a restaurant. Drawing from personal experience, he says, "It's like living in a submarine-- you have to be submerged in it to be successful. Finding time to research ways to green your operations is virtually impossible."

When Alan prepared the grant request for the Environmental Protection Agency's approval, he realized restaurant owners want to do the right thing, and are much more likely to jump onboard if it's easy & makes good business sense. The result is a focused effort outlining initial cost versus return on investment while also addressing *time* as an equally critical issue. Extending beyond simple guidance, Alan aims to help restaurant owners implement the recommended changes.

Alan's ambition was clear when he said, "Going green has been a hot topic for years now, but what is actually being done about it? If people knew the numbers they would be shocked." According to Pacific Gas & Electric's Food Service Technology Center, restaurants use five times more energy per square foot than any other type of commercial business. The goal of this initiative is to take action and verify the results. By the end of March 2012, Alan hopes to save 9.6 million gallons of water, reduce energy consumption by 1,742 MTCE (Metric Tons Carbon Equivalent), and decrease hazardous chemical use by 3,500 pounds.

By simply retrofitting lighting fixtures, walk-in refrigerator/freezer motors, and utilizing occupancy sensors, GustOrganics will save \$7,000 annually. Under a plan GEE provides, the restaurant can pay for the upgrades over the course of a year. To Alberto's surprise the amount paid per month is nearly identical to his current utility payments. GEE explained that the difference in energy savings will be used to pay the loan. Essentially, GustOrganics will be paying off their investment, rather than paying the utility company.

This is only the first of a series of free surveys the initiative provides. Upon learning that GEE is preparing recommendations for GustOrganic's heating, ventilation & air conditioning system, Alberto said, "That's great-- our current system is a 10 ton dinosaur that's eating us alive. We're also planning a vegetative farm on the roof, so now we'll have the chance to design around it."

Viewing this as a pilot program, Alan was thankful to hear Alberto say, "I've always believed that if you do the right thing, good things will happen, but this is huge! It not only helps the environment, the savings could be tremendous! If we could demonstrate how successful this is, everyone would leap at the opportunity."