

The Carbon Neutral Checkout™ Program

It is no mystery why the restaurant industry has a hard time discovering, understanding and implementing sustainable initiatives and operations strategies: when every moment clocked in is spent trying to provide tasty food and a pleasant atmosphere in a way that attracts a regular following of diners, who has time to worry about switching light bulbs, or what dish washing machine they use, or see the correlation between their overall impact, their bottom line, and attractiveness as a brand?

Unfortunately, whether a restaurant sees value in being green or not, the rest of the world does. More and more, diners want local, real food that is good for them *and* the planet. As we march forward into the 21st century, making sure these consumer demands are met will be imperative, not just for your brands sake, but to ensure supply chain disruption is minimized. While a pleasant dining environment, and a signature dish may grant a good review, the food industry players making strides with new and innovative sustainability strategies and initiatives are the ones earning notoriety.

Why? At an ever-increasing pace, the link between agriculture and climate change is being brought under a scrupulous lens. It has been estimated that agriculture, and many of the processes associated with it (food production, fertilizer use and refrigeration) [account for about 1/3 of the total global footprint](#) annually – approximately 12 of 35 billion total metric tons of emissions. This makes food one of the biggest sources of climate change in the world, along with energy generation and transportation. Additionally, for the world to have any shot at avoiding resource scarcity and the economic volatility that comes with it, the carbon footprint of the agricultural sector, and therefore restaurants needs to be managed and reduced with as much vigor as you slow cook your meatballs.

There are many resources available to restaurants, all of which are highlighted by the Green Hospitality Initiative, nevertheless, the problem of low restaurant adoption of these appliances and programs persists. It is still too logistically confounding, or unclear how engaging in sustainable practices will make your customers want to eat at *your establishment* over someone else's.

There exists, however, a different approach restaurants can take, which allows them to reduce their over all impact at no cost, without overhauling their daily operations, while also giving the diner a way to contribute to the success of your efforts, differentiating you from the spot down the street with the same cuisine who just changed their light bulbs.

Carbon emissions, while they may seem whimsical, can and need to be accurately quantified, actively managed, and reduced over the course of the next generation.

Every restaurant uses gas and electricity, refrigeration, and procures produce and protein from farms or markets somewhere outside the premises.

These components are what make up a restaurant's carbon footprint, and considering that one needs to pay energy bills, and manage supply chain logistics to run any business, compiling the information necessary to determine the carbon footprint of any restaurant is as simple as analyzing these documents.

While on one hand, businesses produce carbon emissions, on the other there exist projects and processes, which can reduce and avoid carbon emissions. These projects are called carbon offset projects, and their processes produce what are called carbon credits. For every carbon credit that exists, 1 metric ton of greenhouse gas has been destroyed. Thus, if a business emits 1 ton of emissions every year, and they purchase 1 carbon credit, they effectively nullify their environmental footprint, without buying new appliances, or changing the way they run their business. This process of applying external emissions reductions to your emissions is what's called "offsetting."

For restaurants with larger carbon footprints, that cannot afford to purchase carbon credits, there remains the option to break this cost down across every dish served, as the carbon footprint of a restaurant is the sum of all dishes it serves on an annual basis. Considering a restaurant serves thousands to tens of thousands of dishes every year, it turns out the cost to "offset" a given dish is often a matter of cents.

Thus, if a restaurant either builds the price to offset their food into the plate itself, or makes the option to offset individual meals available to consumers (servers would ask, "Would you like to offset your meal?" much the way they would ask, "Want to take a look at a dessert menu?"), a restaurant can exterminate its *entire* carbon footprint on an annual basis, all while not paying a penny, nor changing the way they do business.

In a world where operating sustainably seems too costly and cumbersome, there *are* ways to [be green at no cost](#) simply by allowing someone to take a look at their electricity bills. That's it!