

LOCAL, ORGANIC AND FRESH

You can't walk ten feet in any supermarket, click through the television channels, or flip through a magazine without seeing or hearing about it. It's hot; white hot! So hot, that the National Restaurant Association (NRA) designated local, organic, fresh food as one of the hottest trends in 2011. In fact, most consider the recent upsurge in organic to be more than just a trend. It has become a movement – and it is spreading fast.

MORE THAN A TREND.

The Organic Monitor says organic sales doubled worldwide between 2003 and 2009, from 25 billion dollars to over 50 billion. Almost half those sales are in the United States, according to the 2010 Organic Trade Association Industry Survey. That's a lot of food, folks – and chefs are taking notice.

In 2010 the NRA surveyed over 1,500 professional chefs in the American Culinary Federation, asking them to identify food trends for 2011. The top three spots were all occupied by locally-sourced and sustainable products. That's pretty remarkable, considering they edged out other popular themes your Maines Culinary Team has already covered this year, including smaller portioning, children's nutrition, ethnic flavors, and alternative cuts of meat.

CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE →

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ORGANIC GOES MAINSTREAM.

Many restaurants are incorporating organic, local foods into their menus and enjoying increased sales and positive feedback from customers. Why can't this happen in your establishment? The most common resistance I hear is, "we're not that kind of place," "my customers won't go for that fancy stuff," or "local/organic ingredients are too expensive." I used to say all of those things but, in fairness, I was never shown the value that making such changes could bring to my food cost, my restaurant's reputation, and my top-line sales.

Adding local/organic menu items doesn't have to be a wholesale white-washing of a restaurant's menu. Because local/organic has become so popular, it's perfectly acceptable to insert menu items featuring these ingredients anywhere you wish. Michael Ty, CEC, AAC, and ACF national president states, "locally sourced food and a focus on sustainability is not just popular among certain segments of consumers anymore; it has become more mainstream."

Remember when a salad meant iceberg lettuce? Now you can get organic spring green salads in vending machines! And, due to increased supply and acreage of U.S. organic growing (almost 5 million acres in 2008, according to the USDA) the prices are coming down. The door is now open to everyone!

CLEAN FOOD IS PURELY PROFITABLE.

"But why, Chef? Why go through the trouble? Isn't it more expensive to buy the organic chicken, the organic vegetables, or grass-fed, anti-biotic and hormone-free beef?" Sometimes. But remember: restaurants profit on the sale, not the purchase. Increased portion cost can be more than made up by a slight increase in menu price as the market is willing to make up the difference. The end result is increased profit dollars in your pocket for selling essentially the same dish. A pan-roasted chicken breast with some potatoes and vegetables would normally command 10-13 dollars, but a free-range, organic, pan-roasted chicken breast with organic, roasted vegetables can net 14-18 dollars. I've even seen it sell for 25 dollars in Syracuse! Why? **Because the market is happy to pay more for something they deem as healthy, sustainable, and better for the environment.** Bottom line: the customer sees value in it, and we need to charge for that value.

You can further increase profits by reducing the portion size of ingredients like Esposito's grass-fed beef, Indian Ridge's Pure Country Beef (see page 22 for products), or farm-raised/sustainable seafood from Hopkins and Indian Ridge. Smaller portions are already in vogue, so you can present a natural item without giving it an exorbitant price tag. Slightly more expensive proteins can share center stage with thoughtfully prepared vegetables. Creative veggie presentations are the new center of the plate, and they're helping to take the sting out of some higher commodity prices this year.



Do you do the local motion?

Many of you are already using local ingredients but may not know it. Maines is a Pride of New York house and our own Peter Grannis sits on the Pride of New York Board at Cornell University.

Maines supports many local farmers by purchasing their produce throughout the year. Why not mention it on your menu? It won't cost you a penny but the mere mention could garner a lot of praise from customers who like to support their local economies. Give credit where credit is due – and in some cases, charge for the perceived value.



PURE COUNTRY PROFITS.

Think you're not in the business of selling farm-raised Baramundi and grass-fed Black Angus? Well, have I got a story for you! I introduced the fresh Indian Ridge Pure Country Black Angus 8 ounce Beef Patties to a restaurant in Syracuse. They wanted to make a change to their burger menu, were searching for a hook, but didn't want to isolate their market. They rolled out the special antibiotic and hormone-free burger menu, increased menu prices by 33%, and sold out of burgers the first weekend. The burgers were essentially the same, but with the increased perceived value, the sale was automatic. When given the option of a cleaner, healthier burger, they didn't even look twice. For the first time this pub menu was a legitimate profit center!

Introducing organic, local and sustainable menu items can mean better profits, but there's an even stronger upside. Who doesn't want more thoughtfully produced food that was raised in ecologically-conscientious ways? **It's not just a trend, but a shift in the way our business thinks about doing business.** Customers are demanding these types of items and we need to keep them happy or they will go somewhere else to find them. We strongly encourage you to try some organic/ local items and if you have questions, don't hesitate to engage your Maines Culinary Team. We are here to help you navigate the organic waters – and to help you become more profitable in doing so.



EGGPLANT AND PROSCIUTTO ROLLATINI WITH SAFFRON-CITRUS TOMATO SAUCE

YIELDS: 4 Servings

as seen
on cover

097173	8 ea. 1/4" Slices Large Eggplant
050907	8 ea. Slices Fiorucci Prosciutto
019105	8 oz. Sliced 1/4" Slices Mozzarella, Fresh, 4 oz.
097238	8 large leaves Markon Basil, plus smaller leaves for garnish
345632	1 tsp. Culinary Secrets Cracked Pepper
370868	1/2 c. Extra Virgin Olive Oil
097210	1 tbsp. Chopped fine Markon Peeled Garlic
097737	2 tbsp. Chopped fine Peeled Shallots
225647	1 tbsp. Tomato Paste
225685	4 c. Chopped Coarsely Bountiful Harvest Whole Peeled Tomatoes
345103	Pinch Saffron
210604	1/4 c. Orange Juice

DIRECTIONS

To make the sauce:

1. In saucepan place olive oil, garlic and shallots. Sweat over medium heat until fragrant and translucent.
2. Add tomato paste and cook 2 minutes.
3. Add chopped tomato, saffron and orange juice and cook 10 minutes until flavors develop and sauce thickens. Do not overcook.
4. Set sauce aside until ready to serve.

To make rollettes;

1. Place slices of eggplant on work surface and top with one slice of prosciutto and a large basil leaf. Spoon on 1-2 tablespoons of sauce.
2. Roll eggplant rollettes up and place seam side down in roasting pan coated in olive oil. Drizzle each rollette with a teaspoon of olive oil.
3. Roast rollettes for 10 minutes at 375°F until slightly browned and cooked through. Do not overcook!
4. Remove from oven and top each rollette with a slice of mozzarella. Place in oven for 1 minute to wilt cheese.
5. Coat serving plates with Saffron-Citrus tomato sauce and arrange two eggplant rollettes.
6. Garnish each rollette with cracked pepper and scatter small basil leaves around. Serve immediately.