

## Chapter 2: Menu Planning Sustainable Food

### Introduction

**Menu planning, also referred to as menu engineering, is commonly understood as a process of deciding what meals, food and drink items the catering or restaurant business is going to offer to its guests on their menus.** It is a practice common in HoReCa industries – especially in the context of restaurants, hotels, catering and other units offering food products or dining services. Maximising business' profitability is generally indicated as the main goal of menu planning practices. However, it is essential to point out that menu planning is not merely a practice of analysing and designing a menu but is also fundamental in strategically maximising the restaurants profits. It should be considered as the study of meal quality and consumers expectations, as well as a philosophy leading the consumer to a desired purchase while at the same time adhering to their needs, values and aesthetics.

(James & Baldwin, 2003)

**Menu**  
- ut autem irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse  
cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat  
cupidatat non proident, officia deserunt mollit anim id est  
laborum.

**Best Seller**



## Introduction



The debate on sustainability trends in various areas of operation, including menu planning in the HoReCa sector, has been ongoing within this industry for the past few decades. Nowadays, sustainable food consumption has become not only an item of discussion for industry experts or researchers, but also an important element of every-day eating culture. Therefore, the HoReCa businesses can no longer ignore the debate. Gradually, sustainability trends enter all areas of hotel, restaurant and catering organisations' operations. According to the What's Hot Culinary Forecast for 2019 published by National Restaurant Association representing over 380 000 restaurant units in USA, sustainability was ranked as the third most popular food trend. Moreover, in their latest industry report presenting predictions for 2030, the Association stated that sustainability will be integrated into every aspect of restaurant operations, with kitchen organisation and menu planning playing leading roles ( The National Restaurant Association Research and Knowledge Group, 2019).

Similar changes are forecasted and can be already observed in the European market. According to the survey conducted by the International Trade Commission, the food industry was identified as the sector with the greatest increase in the number of customers demanding sustainable products and services (International Trade Centre, 2019). Adopting a sustainable approach towards menu planning in modern HoReCa organisations is however not only motivated by trends on the market, but first and foremost by the ever-broadening realisation and understanding of the impact that hospitality and catering industries have on the environment. .



### Objectives

After completing this chapter, you will:

- Be able to indicate key principles of sustainable menu planning,
- Recognise main sustainable food labels in Europe,
- Become aware of sustainability trends in the HoReCa industry,
- Understand the value of a sustainable menu from the perspective of a business and a consumer.

## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

From the HoReCa industry perspective, the menu planning process is an element of a business strategy that aims to generate profits for an organisation. There is no doubt that the menu, designed in an attractive way, is an invaluable asset for any business. Nowadays however, both customers and organisations are more and more aware of the impact that the carbon footprint and greenhouse gases generated directly and indirectly by the foodservice sector have on the environment. Hence, different environmentally friendly solutions in hotel, restaurant and catering organisations are being named among the leading innovations in the HoReCa sector in the beginning of the 21st century. This shift does not omit the menu planning process either. **In the perspective of ongoing changes in various levels of businesses' external environments, sustainable menu planning becomes not only a trend demanded by rising number of customers, but also an expected and necessary contribution of the HoReCa sector to the environmental cause.**





## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

Sustainable menu planning reflects the decisions managers, chefs and organisers make regarding the selection of foods and beverages served in hotels, restaurants and catering units as well as during various events and conferences. It should be based on realisation that there are various sustainable options, and that it is the responsibility of the HoReCa businesses to gradually replace the non-environmentally friendly practices in their everyday routine. Furthermore, it is the role of managers and business owners to educate themselves and their staff on the selection of the new environmentally friendly options available, and the benefits of making healthy and environmentally responsible choices.



## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning



**When designing a menu, the responsible manager or chef needs to take into consideration various factors. Among them there are for example: capabilities and the number of the kitchen staff, space and equipment in the kitchen, cost and available supplies, competitors' offerings, type and location of the organisation, current trends as well as general nutrition guidelines.**

## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

There are many lenses through which the HoReCa organisations may look at when considering the sustainability options in their practices. However, in order to ensure that the menu is designed respecting the core sustainability rules and values, the menu planning and designing process should guarantee that the following **five key principles of a sustainable menu planning** are considered (The Culinary Institut of America, Harvard T.H. Chan, School of Public Health, 2019): **respond to the needs of the business and consumer, transparency regarding sourcing and preparation, include seasonal and local products, reduced portion sizes, and reduced number of dishes.**





## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

### Unit 2.1.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

**On the one hand, a menu should be able to respond in the best possible options and needs of the consumers in terms of providing expected food or drink service.** However, accept from offering a unique dining experience, first of all a menu should be designed in a consistent and knowledgeable manner to ensure it is healthy, tasty and safely prepared. A menu should reflect the general recommendations on healthy eating and a balanced diet. The European Commission has adapted food-based dietary guidelines, to serve as recommendations in European scale for individuals, to inform them about specific nutrition requirements and health needs. Due to country-specific nutrient intake levels, availability of food products, and cultural characteristics, the guidelines are usually unique to the member state, taking from healthy nutrition pyramids, eat-well plates or circles of nutrition. Nonetheless, the guidelines developed and adapted in the European Union countries plus Switzerland, Iceland and Norway are characterised by core similarities. One of the most important goals of the guidelines is to encourage individuals to make more sustainable consumer choices. Hence, the HoReCa sector businesses around Europe should take into account these recommendations.

(European Commission, 2019)





## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

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**On the other hand, a menu also serves as a marketing tool for a business. In general, the main aim of a menu is to generate the income for an organisation.** Through learning who the customer is, what the expectations and needs of the customer are, what are the capabilities of the kitchen, a restaurant or catering company should be able to provide a menu that considers those and other factors, while still being able to maximise income. Taking both of those perspectives into consideration, the move towards sustainability on the scale of an individual business or the whole restaurant and catering industry, requires for menus to be designed based on a balance between the needs of the consumer and the business.



## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

### Unit 2.1.2 - Transparent about sourcing and preparation

**Providing customers with information about food production methods, sourcing strategies, nutrient values, and environmental impacts is not only a good practice for restaurant and catering organisations but a necessity from the perspective of sustainability.** A growing interest in environment protection results in consumer engagement being driven by the rise in food safety and ethics across global supply chains. Given that, food operators are more often expected to be sharing information about their own practices. It is important to remember, that in today's internet-driven era consumers can learn about what they eat regardless of what details chefs and business managers share in their menus.

Additionally, sharing sufficient information on the ingredients and cooking methods used to prepare certain dishes helps to significantly minimise the amount of ill-thought choices by the consumers, which contributes to minimising the plate waste generated.





## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

### Unit 2.1.3 - Includes seasonal and local meals

When designing sustainable menus, it is highly recommended to draw the ideas and inspiration from local farmers and their crops. **The advantages of local sourcing include working with small, local producers who may not only be more willing to experiment with varieties but are also more flexible and able to adjust to changing needs and customers' expectations.** A focus on local foods also contributes to supporting local economy, building community and creating new development opportunities.





## **Unit 2.1** - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

### **Unit 2.1.3** - Includes seasonal and local meals



Admittedly, sourcing sustainably grown foods is very challenging, however the environmental cost of food is largely determined by how it is produced. Sustainable sourcing although challenging is necessary. Sustainable strategies for sourcing local ingredients should be connected with supporting environmentally friendly farms and producers.

## **Unit 2.1** - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

### **Unit 2.1.3** - Includes seasonal and local meals

**Also, seasonal fruits and vegetables can help create unique flavours as well as new marketing opportunities.** It is recommended, instead of rewriting their menus every season, restaurants should replace meals that are already out of season with seasonal-based ingredients. **A sustainable menu should offer at least 30% seasonal dishes, with a minimum of two seasonal dishes per each of its sections.**



## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

### Unit 2.1.4 - Reduced portion sizes

Reducing portion size and emphasizing calorie quality over quantity has become a good practice for some businesses across the HoReCa industry. **Moderating portion size is considered to be one of the biggest steps foodservice operators can take towards reducing food waste.** In addition, it is important to underline that portion reduction should not be replaced by offering multiple dish sizes. This practice often encourages consumers to order bigger portions, as they are often afraid of losing the value offered by the meal when ordering the smaller portion. Instead it is recommended that a sustainable menu should change the value proposition for customers from an emphasis on quantity to a focus on flavour, nutrient quality, culinary adventure, new menu formats, and the total culinary and dining experience.





## Unit 2.1 - Key principles of sustainable menu planning

### Unit 2.1.5 - Reduced number of dishes

In the case of a menu, less is truly more. A small menu makes the decision-making process easier for consumers. It decreases the probability of overordering and minimises the amount of plate waste produced. On the other hand, it helps serving staff - as instead of remembering many items of the menu, they may focus on the features of each individual dish. In addition, a **smaller menu is less expensive to maintain and is more flexible when subject to seasonal changes.**

**Simultaneously to rationalising the number of dishes in their menu,** foodservice operators should incorporate a process of reducing the amount of ingredients used across the menu. For example, the same ingredients should be used various times, cooked in different ways across number of dishes.



## Unit 2.2 - Ecolabels and environmentally friendly products

**Ecolabels are a form of certification applied for a product or a service, that aim to guarantee the standards in relation to, for example, supply chain or production process. The ecolabel ensures standards are transparent and guarantees that the product or service will meet specific expectations of consumers.**



## Unit 2.2 - Ecolabels and environmentally friendly products

Each label includes a set of policies that the product or service needs to fulfil in order to be able to use the label. Ecolabeling, unlike some certification marks described in European and national legislations, is a volunteering method of certifying environmentally friendly performance and intends to help customers who wish to take environmental concerns into account when shopping, while making the most informed decisions.





## Unit 2.2 - Ecolabels and environmentally friendly products



There are different labels and certifications used and applied regarding the environmental performance of a product or service around the world. Ecolabeling is only one type of such certification. In order to help understand those diversified certification schemes and to ensure the credibility and authenticity of labels, the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) has identified three categories of labels in the market. Ecolabeling is included into the first group (Global Ecolabeling Network, 2019):

- Type 1: a voluntary scheme, based on multiple criteria and involvement of a third-party evaluator, that awards license authorising the use of environmental label indicating overall environmental preferability of a product in its category;
- Type 2: informative environmental self-declaration claims;
- Type 3: voluntary programmes aiming to provide environment-related data of a product, under pre-set parameters established and verified by a third-party.

## Unit 2.2 - Ecolabels and environmentally friendly products

As an international certification scheme, ecolabeling has become a very useful tool firstly for governments and European institutions, to encourage a shift towards more environmentally-friendly practices; secondly for ecological businesses to build a strong position and recognition of the market; and last but not least for consumers to be able to adjust their purchasing decisions based on their values and belief that the chosen product or service will have less of a negative environmental impact than its substitutes. In general, there are three key aims of ecolabeling (Global Ecolabeling Network, 2019):

- Protecting the environment
- Encouraging environmentally sound innovation and leadership
- Build consumer awareness of environmental issues

Ensuring that ecolabels really stand behind the standards and values that they promote, it is crucial that they maintain their credibility and recognition. Organisations such as Global Ecolabeling Network (GEN), aims to improve and develop the ecolabeling of products and services on a global scale and oversee the redeeming procedures and standards set by certain labels (Global Ecolabeling Network, 2019). Monitoring existing ecolabels and their standards on a global scale is facilitated by organisations such as the 'Ecolabel Index'. Its website provides a free and open access to 463 ecolabels in 199 countries and in 25 different sectors (Ecolabel Index, 2019).



## Unit 2.2 - Ecolabels and environmentally friendly products

### How can HoReCa organisations benefit from ecolabels?

**DIFFERENTIATION** the ecolabel helps building market advantage

**CREDIBILITY** the ecolabel guarantees standard of environmental performance

**VALIDATION** the ecolabel proves environmental values of organisation

**RIGOUR** the ecolabel is guaranteed by independent evaluation

**RECOGNISIBILITY** the ecolabel is recognised by a worldwide market

**RELEVANCE** the ecolabel concentrates on relevant issues

**INSPIRATION** the ecolabel promotes sustainable approach and values

Ecolabels exist in almost every major industry, including each of the HoReCa sectors. When implementing sustainable strategies into the design of their menu, HoReCa businesses should become aware of various ecolabels functioning in the food market (especially if their supply chain is long e.g. when they import ingredients from abroad). Basing the menu on products that are awarded ecolabels is not only a vital guarantee for the consumer that a business is fulfilling its ecological obligations, but also helps genuinely mitigate company's negative environmental impact (Legrand, Sloan, & Chen, 2017).

Ecolabel Index contains in total over one hundred ecolabels under the category of food. Each of the labels is characterised by clear and very restrictive regulations that guarantees its value for businesses and consumers. Some of the labels are awarded on an international scale, others on smaller – regional or national range.

Some of the more commonly known food ecolabels are:

- Fair Trade – it certifies products that were created in an environmentally-friendly manner, but only if farmers and workers were paid fair salaries and their working conditions were safe.



## Unit 2.2 - Ecolabels and environmentally friendly products

- **Direct Trade** – it certifies farms and products in coffee and chocolate industry, that are characterised by ethical trading standards, especially regarding sustainable growth of local communities in developing countries and ethical labour regulations.
- **Non-GMO** – this ecolabel guarantees that products and land where they were cultivated are not genetically modified.
- **Animal Welfare Approved** – it certifies that animals were raised in ethical conditions – free-range or outdoors, and with application of high-welfare farming methods.
- **Carbon Reduction Label** – this ecolabel guarantees that the carbon footprint created during the whole production process is systematically measured and the producer take actions in order to constantly minimise it.

**Accept from choosing foods and products awarded with ecolabels, HoReCa units may take a step further and adjust their overall kitchen and menu planning operations and practices to standards of ecolabels addressed directly to restaurant and catering organisations.** Although this process will sometimes require changes and adjustments in overall practices of HoReCa organisations, that are in turn connected with high investments of time, management and sometimes financial capital, the labels certify that organisations are committed to sustainable practices and are taking actions to minimise and ease their negative impact on the environment. Ecolabels bring various additional benefits such as competitive advantage and recognisability.



## Unit 2.2 - Ecolabels and environmentally friendly products

The examples of more recognisable ecolabels in the HoReCa sector include:

- **Green Seal** – it is an ecolabel standard for restaurant and food service operations as well as hospitality units, that considers various aspects of their activities such as extraction of raw-materials in everyday practices, use and reuse or disposal of materials, cleaning products and services used or even materials used in building and production process.
- **Green Table** – is an ecolabel directed to restaurant professionals, suppliers and other supply chain related parties. Its main aim is to promote sustainability standards in menu design, high quality of ingredients and reduction of food related waste.
- **Ocean Wise** – this ecolabel is awarded to any HoReCa and markets that demonstrate high level of seafood awareness and promote ocean-friendly buying decisions.
- **LEAF (Leaders in Environmentally Affordable Foodservice)** – is awarded to restaurants and catering units characterised by high sustainability standards, expressed for example by serving local, organic food, reducing their energy and water use, reduce waste and use environmentally-friendly supplies



## Unit 2.3 - Trends and expectations of modern consumers

“If your menu has the word ‘sustainability’, your ingredients are considered ‘clean’ and you’re prepared to tell the stories behind the food you’re serving, then you’re already living in the restaurant of the future”. This conclusion from the “Industry Report” by the National Restaurant Association indicates the importance of turning the practice of menu planning in a more sustainable direction. The report clearly shows that **modern consumers are becoming increasingly interested in processes that contribute to the dish being served on their plate**. Nowadays, a lot of consumers’ attention is paid to food sourcing and production process, supply chain and even restaurant packaging and waste management systems applied. Sustainability has found its place in the report’s top ten predicted trends that are going to shape how hotel, restaurants and catering units will change by 2030. **It seems clear that the caterers will have to not only find the ways to drive environmental costs down but also showcase their efforts to attract consumers who are becoming more and more interested in anything related to sustainability.**

( The National Restaurant Association Research and Knowledge Group, 2019)





## Unit 2.3 - Trends and expectations of modern consumers



The “Industry Report” is not the first to reveal the growing power of the sustainability culinary trend. Similar conclusions can be found in the survey conducted by the International Trade Commission on behalf of the European Commission in 2019. The survey aims to research what are the factors impacting trade in modern Europe. The results proved that over 85% of retailers in various sectors of the European industry indicated sustainability to be the dominant factor in their product sourcing strategies. The demand on sustainably sourced products was especially high in the food sector including food service, where over 98% of business owners reported increased sales of sustainable products in the scope of past five years. **In general, the key findings of the report highlighted that consumers in major European Union markets demand the food industry to be more engaged in social and environmental causes, and to be more transparent on the practices they apply on regular basis.**

(International Trade Centre, 2019)

## Unit 2.3 - Trends and expectations of modern consumers

Among the sustainable trends in kitchen organisation and menu planning practices, zero waste cooking was indicated as one of the dominant movements in 2019. This trend is based on reducing the amount of food waste produced in the process of preparing, cooking and serving food in restaurant and catering businesses. Admittedly, some waste in foodservice sector is practically unavoidable, however the zero-waste cooking approach demands businesses to identify the areas for improvement and indicate necessary changes into the areas where it is possible. The zero waste approach to cooking is particularly beneficial from the perspective of sustainability when supported by side actions such as (National Restaurant Association, 2019):

- Reducing the amount of food and ingredients in stock,
- Using smaller plates at buffets,
- Serving smaller portions,
- Purchasing smaller quantities of food and ingredients more frequently,
- Properly storing and measuring temperatures for foods that spoil quickly,
- Avoid bottled water and instead serving plain or filtered tap water in reusable jugs or bottles,
- Crafting menus to utilize as much of ingredients as possible.





## Unit 2.3 - Trends and expectations of modern consumers

According to the 2019 edition of the annual “Menus of Change” report, plant-forward cooking is another of the dominant trends among modern culinary strategies. **Plant-forward, known also as plant-based cooking is an umbrella term to describe vegetarian, vegan and plant-rich approaches in professional cooking.** In the scope of past two years, business researchers have been systematically observing how this trend slowly but systematically emerged and transitioned from the fringes of dining culture to the mainstream media, impacting many other trends in professional kitchen. The authors of the report go so far as to claim, that “vegetable-centric menus are not a hot trend anymore, but rather, a new normal”. The findings of the report suggest that foodservice providers need to pay more attention to the sustainable options offered in menus, as greenhouse gas production, land use, and healthy nutrition are becoming top priorities in consumers decision making process.

(The Culinary Institut of America, Harvard T.H. Chan, School of Public Health, 2019)





## Unit 2.3 - Trends and expectations of modern consumers

Another trend that is very visible on the foodservice market in most European Union countries is a dramatically changing attitude towards meat consumption. Except from serving meat from local and organic farmers and ensuring that it is produced to high environmental and animal welfare standards, the recommendations presented in 2019 Culinary Forecast for restaurant and catering businesses include a reduction of the amount of meat served per plate and a shift instead to offering more vegetarian options. In fact, the recommendations reach further than just minimising the amount of meat served, but also suggest a reduction of the amount of other products of animal origin, such as dairy products and eggs (National Restaurant Association, 2019).



## Unit 2.4 - Benefits of sustainable menu for businesses and consumers

The growing strength of trends that aim towards a shift in more sustainable menu planning and cooking seems undeniable. Although, introducing sustainable solutions to menu planning is not an easy process and the HoReCa organisations that decide to follow those trends face a lot of challenges, it is foreseen to be an unavoidable change. Adapting sustainable practices although challenging, may be the source of various benefits for the HoReCa organisations.



One of the undeniable benefits is an improved brand image. The overall negative environmental impact of the HoReCa sector can significantly impact the image of organisations operating in the sector. However, according to various studies (e.g. National Restaurant Association, 2019; European Commission, 2019), customers especially in relation to food and beverage services, favour businesses that practice sustainable habits and positively impact their social and ecological environment. Therefore, implementing sustainable strategies when menu planning as well as other actions of the HoReCa organisations can vastly contribute to building their

## Unit 2.4 - Benefits of sustainable menu for businesses and consumers

Since the main goal of every business is to generate profit, the area of the main concern is to look for and implement strategies that allow the reduction of costs and maximise profits. **Introducing sustainable strategies to menu planning and other operations of the HoReCa sector organisations leads to more efficient practices that contribute in turn to reduced amount of resources and effort invested, which enhances productivity and minimises costs.** Some of the changes necessary for implementing sustainable solutions into the menu planning process, such as changing suppliers for more eco-friendly and sourcing new products might require additional investment and may be more expensive to implement. Nevertheless, in the long-term perspective, the research suggests that the results justify the investment.





## Unit 2.4 - Benefits of sustainable menu for businesses and consumers



On the other hand, consumers also benefit from the sustainable and zero waste solutions adapted in HoReCa organisations. **One of the most important benefits to recognise is a positive impact on consumers health.** As determined in the opening sentence of guidelines for sustainable healthy diets by Food and Agriculture Organisation of United Nations in its 2018 report, next to degradation of environment and natural resources, malnutrition and unhealthy eating habits are the most critical challenges faced by modern world.

## Unit 2.4 - Benefits of sustainable menu for businesses and consumers

The problem is serious not only because numbers of the undernourished people has been growing for several years, but also because the number of overweight and obese people increases at accelerating pace all over the world. Research shows that globally over 2 billion adults and over 40 million children are overweight. At the same time, 820 million people experience hunger on daily basis. Both undernutrition and overeating have clear negative impact on health, well-being and productivity of individuals. Hence, promoting positive and sustainable eating habits as well as implementing sustainable menu strategies in the HoReCa businesses creates health benefits for the consumers (FAO and WHO, 2019). Additionally, social, demographic and economic factors are highly contributing to shifts in eating habits. For example, changing lifestyles with less time for cooking, result in consumers more often reaching for take-away and eat out options. The quality and sustainability of menus offered, and ingredients provided plays ever important role.



## Unit 2.4 - Benefits of sustainable menu for businesses and consumers



**Plus, positive sustainable practices promoted by businesses in HoReCa can encourage consumers to adopt more sustainable options in their own everyday cooking.**

Moreover, it is important to remember that patterns of modern food consumption and production have been proven to have a critically negative impact on the environment and natural resources on the global scale. **As an example, the above mentioned, FAO and HWO report states that “food production accounts for the use of 48% of land and 70% of freshwater resources respectively at the global level” (FAO and WHO, 2019). Reducing those and other negative impacts in long term perspective can indisputably improve living conditions of individuals as well as contribute to building more sustainable communities and restoring some of the natural resources.**



## Appendices

### Appendix 2.1 - Quick Action Checklist to Identify Sustainable Elements of Menu

Area	Task	Yes	No
Certifications and ecolabels	Most of the ingredients used to compose the meals are awarded environmentally friendly eco labels		
	Producers and suppliers of ingredients are certified with schemes guaranteeing environmental practices and fair labour regulations		
	Noncertified products are sourced locally		
Sustainable principles	Needs of a restaurant and a consumer are satisfied in a balanced way		
	Seasonal options in menu are available		
	Information about food production methods, sourcing strategies, and environmental impacts are available in the menu		
	Nutrient values of each meal are available in the menu		
	Menu is composed with an account for local/regional/national nutritional guidelines		
	Information on the ingredients and cooking methods used to prepare certain dishes are available in the menu		
	Multiple portion sizes are available		
	Portion are reduced to an optimal size, <b>emphasizing calorie quality over quantity</b>		
	Number of dishes offered is minimised		
	Same ingredients are used various times, cooked in different ways across number of dishes		
	Served meat originates from local and organic farmers and is produced to high environmental and animal welfare standards		
	Number of meat-based dishes is reduction to minimum		
	Product of animal origin such as dairy products and eggs are limited to minimum		
	Plant-based dishes are the core of menu		

