

Food in the hospitality industry: Why sourcing it locally matters

By  Sharmila Ragunanan

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As the desire for fresh local food continues to grow, farm-to-table dining is set to become an even more significant 2019 trend in the hospitality industry.



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Hotels are increasingly using gardens, small farms or, in the case of city hotels, their rooftops to grow herbs and vegetables. While some create their own gardens, other hotels choose to shop locally. That is an effective way to meet sustainability goals and stand out from competitors, but also to feed growing customer demand.

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Sustainable food for thought

Years ago, travellers wanted the convenience and comfort of familiar foods, but, last year alone, the UNWTO noted that 73% of Millennials and 51% of Baby Boomers were willing to pay more for sustainability when it came to travel choices. These markets are now increasingly drawn to regional and local flair and are more willing to pay a premium for fresh, high-quality ingredients.

Millennials make up some of the most avid buyers of sustainable and organic products and wield greater influence as their spending power continues to rise. The market is also more educated than ever and wants to know the history of the food they consume, which means hospitality stakeholders must know what they have on their plate.

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With the rise in meat-free and plant-based diets, as well as the ongoing conversation regarding the livestock sector and greenhouse gas emissions, hotels and their restaurants need to stay ahead when planning seasonal menus.

At the heart of local purchasing is an overall commitment to environmental sustainability, and consumer concern regarding plastic pollution and single-use food packaging is also adding to the pressure food companies are under. It is also a topic for industry players to consider when evaluating their supply chain in 2019.

Why sourcing local really matters

While the genuine concern for sourcing sustainable food has become an important topic regarding meeting the demands of customers, it has also become integral in supporting our economy.

South Africa's focus on all things 'local' re-emerged after the comments made by President Ramaphosa in his keynote address at the jobs summit in Midrand at the end of last year. The president has urged government entities, the private sector and individuals to make a concerted effort to support local enterprises to alleviate the country's current 27.2% unemployment rate.

When done right, purchasing food from local farmers and artisans makes a drastic impact in supporting area communities. Last year, The Peninsula All-Suite Hotel in Sea Point set about moving towards local economic sustainability by putting their support and buying power behind carefully-selected local producers in the Western Cape. Since then, the hotel's Sunset Restaurant has brought to life a diverse culinary selection that features many local influences.



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Not only has supporting local businesses worked out more cost effective for the hotel but, more importantly, it has stimulated us to offer better and tastier products, while showcasing and endorsing local entrepreneurs, artisans and farmers, and their brands to international visitors to Cape Town.

Locally produced beer, wine and spirits are also a meaningful way to round out a locally focused menu - and it's becoming

easier to do. The commitment to the initiative at The Peninsula also extends to one of our biggest partners, the Woodstock Gin Company, which sources their botanicals from the Cape Flats Fynbos Nursery, which in turn advocates for the preservation of our indigenous fynbos while providing jobs in quality working conditions to local people in the area.

In doing good and talking about it, forward-thinking restaurateurs who add fresh, locally-grown products to their bill, have an opportunity to show guests that they genuinely care about the food they serve, while standing out as eco-conscious pioneers in the industry.

ABOUT SHARMILA RAGUNANAN

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