

Green and Healthy Restaurants in Columbia

Columbia has a wealth of excellent restaurants, and many are serving dishes based on traditional local recipes using local heirloom farm products and SC harvested seafood.

This year, *Natural Awakenings* begins searching for restaurants that embrace the future of dining—that includes not only exceptional food quality, but better nutrition, accommodation for special diets, serving locally grown foods in an energy-efficient building, and reducing waste as much as possible.

Natural Awakenings readers tend to look for restaurants that understand natural health and green living. Many of them are into fitness, and at the same time, are sensitive to the Earth and the plight of industrial farm livestock. They read ingredients on labels, shop at the local farmers' market and buy organic when they can. They never order endangered Chilean sea bass, orange roughy or imported shark.

Survey results:

Locavore

Nearly every restaurant that responded scored the same, indicating that they serve local SC farm products, in season, as a percentage of their menu offerings. Our prediction is that as hydroponics continues to grow, we'll be finding many local restaurants able to offer exceptionally fresh locally grown (even grown downtown) produce throughout the year.

Building Efficiency

Surprisingly, many surveys indicated zero points for conservation and energy efficiency. Simply installing energy-efficient lighting is a start. More efficient refrigeration and air conditioning is another step, along with better building insulation. Also, at some point, restaurants should begin taking advantage of solar hot water heating.

Waste Control

Again, every business should be doing what it can to avoid waste by recycling. Contracting for collection of separated recyclable trash is a simple forward step. Composting food waste is a bigger step, and not impossible. Including compostable take-out and serving bowls, boxes and trays is a laudable effort. In this category, the grand prize goes to **Rosewood Market and Deli**, where owner Basil

Garzia not only recycles everything possible, he purchases compostable paper products, has food waste taken to City Roots Farm for composting, and buys produce from the farm, completing the entire cycle. But wait, there's more. Rosewood saves its cardboard boxes intact, collects packing material and recycles it to a mailing/shipping company. It even serves as a collection point for phone book recycling and hosts events to promote recycling. If there were any additional effort toward reuse and recycling possible, Garzia would have already done it.

Whole and Natural Foods

Natural Awakenings readers search out natural farm foods, and taking that a step further, will buy organic where available and free-range meats from farms where they know animals are well cared for. **Za's Brick Oven Pizza** and **Garden Bistro** both reported high scores in this category.

Special Diet Accommodations

Many families search out healthy restaurants where they know that their child with a peanut allergy will be safe, or their guest with gluten sensitivity will have main entree menu items to choose from. Many *Natural Awakenings* readers opt for vegan and vegetarian diets, and find it difficult to get main entrees in some restaurants that satisfy their needs. In some cases, restaurants can make very simple adjustments to existing menu items to create a generous selection of special-diet options. Gluten-free bread or pasta can be substituted in dishes, and dutiful care to avoid contamination with ingredients that could trigger an allergy can make the difference for many. For very serious allergies, always get a doctor's recommendation and instructions. **Garden Bistro**, **Z Pizza**, **116 State Street Café and Wine Bar** and **Rosewood Market and Deli** scored higher for accommodating special diets. Z Pizza offers gluten-free pizza, and Rosewood frequently carries gluten-free and macrobiotic menu items.

Sea Safe

Restaurants are choosing farmed fish for their fish dishes, as well as locally caught sustainable fish and shellfish, more frequently. The SC Aquarium has a sustainable fish program, as does Greenpeace and other organizations that are attempting to develop criteria that may help endangered fish populations recover. Fish that are endangered in US fishing grounds may be plentiful and sustainable in South American waters, so there are occasional disagreements between seafood markets and chefs as to what the best strategy should be. **Z Pizza**, **Mr. Friendly**, **Cellar on Greene** and **Solstice** all scored higher for using farmed fish.

Restaurant dining in Columbia will certainly continue to evolve, and our prediction will be that more organic, natural and whole foods will appear in increasing amounts on menus. Alternative-diet menus will become more common, and vegetarian options will increase to include more daily specials and signature dishes. Recycling and energy efficiency will also expand when restaurants catch on to both the economic and goodwill benefits of doing so.