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DINING GREEN

By Jenny Hontz
For dineLA.com

It's not easy being green. Just ask Sean Krajewski, director of operations for **Mendocino Farms**, one of a dozen Los Angeles eateries certified by the Green Restaurant Association. When the sandwich shop switched to biodegradable soup containers, employees had to warn customers to use two or eat fast.

"We tell people, you have about 10 minutes before this self destructs," says Krajewski, who is also working on the new green restaurant, **Casa**, with Chef Joseph Centeno. "It degrades so fast people would call and say, 'I totally appreciate you being green, but I need this soup to not be on my lap.'"

And then there's the issue of people throwing the wrong kind of trash in the compost bin. "We have to pick it out," he says. "We try to educate people, but it's a battle. I never imagined I'd be picking out trash from a compost pile. I could have sworn this was supposed to be a good idea."

Despite the pitfalls, Mendocino Farms is just one of many local restaurants taking steps to minimize their impact on the environment. Eco-friendly trends include using local, organic and seasonal ingredients, buying only sustainable seafood, and using reclaimed woods and energy-efficient lighting in restaurant design.

Restaurants such as **Ciudad**, **Wilshire**, **Luckyfish** and **Akasha** are also eliminating bottled water shipped from far-flung locales, switching to their own filtration systems instead. Chef Andrew Kirschner at Wilshire, which recently won a sustainability award, and chef Neal Fraser of **Grace** are even fueling their Mercedes with grease from their restaurants.

"I have two cars that run on vegetable oil," Fraser says. "It smells like donuts. It makes people behind me hungry."

The Lobster in Santa Monica just received an award for installing 54 solar panels and making a number of other earth-friendly changes. When the restaurant bought Metro passes for its employees, "half the staff took us up on it, even those with cars," says General Manager Jack de Nicola.

Latin restaurants Ciudad and **Border Grill** serve only sustainable seafood and 100 percent organic rice and beans, even though chef owners Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger think Mexican parboiled rice tastes better. "I can't find an organic source for it, which is frustrating me to no end," Milliken says. "I'm pushing and pushing to find somebody. Everything you buy sends a message."

Some believe the best way to help the environment is to go vegetarian. **Leaf Cuisine** in Culver City, which is certified green by the GRA, serves all organic, vegan cuisine, as does **Madeleine Bistro** in Tarzana. **M Café de Chaya** in Hollywood focuses on macrobiotic food — no red meat, poultry, eggs or dairy. When its publicists send out press kits, they provide a self-addressed, stamped envelope so reporters can return them for reuse.

Eco-friendly restaurants that serve meat are careful about the source. "I'm always going to enjoy and serve meat, but only meat that has no hormones or antibiotics," Kirschner says. "That's where I draw the line."

Wilshire, M Café de Chaya, Blue Velvet, Ciudad, Mendocino Farms, **J Restaurant and Lounge** and **Aventura Catering** are hosting a **Taste of Green LA** welcome reception to the Green West Expo at the Los Angeles Convention Center on May 20. Meanwhile, **Blue on Blue** at the Avalon in Beverly Hills is hosting an Earth Day prix-fix menu, with a portion of the proceeds raised from April 21-26 going to Global Green USA.

Going green is definitely trendy, but many chefs are long-time believers. "I don't know if anyone else cares, but I think the planet cares," says Fraser, who recently added a Close to Home tasting menu. "I have kids, and I want them to be able to breathe when they're 60 years old."

- Mendocino Farms, 300 South Grand Ave., Los Angeles; 213.620.1114
- Ciudad, 445 S. Figueroa St., Los Angeles; 213.486.5171
- Border Grill, 1445 4th St., Santa Monica; 310.451.1655
- Wilshire Restaurant: 2454 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica; 310.586.1707
- Luckyfish, 338 N. Canon Dr., Beverly Hills; 310.274.9800
- Akasha, 9543 Culver Blvd., Culver City; 310.845.1700
- Lobster, 1602 Ocean Ave., Santa Monica; 310.458.9294
- Grace Restaurant, 7360 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles; 323.934.4400
- Madeleine Bistro, 18621 Ventura Blvd., Tarzana; 818.758.6971
- Leaf Cuisine, 11938 W. Washington Blvd., Culver City; 310.390.6005
- M Cafe de Chaya, 7119 Melrose Ave., Hollywood; 323.525.0588
- Blue Velvet, 750 S. Garland Ave., Los Angeles; 213.239.0061
- J Restaurant and Lounge, 1119 South Olive St., Los Angeles; 213.746.7746
- Blue on Blue, 9400 West Olympic Blvd., Beverly Hills, 310.277.5221



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