



# Sustainability

## Do we care?

It's the big topic in a year when the UK hosts the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, the COP26, in Glasgow. Sustainability is on everyone's lips, but we've also been talking about it for years and yet global warming seems to continue at an alarming rate. Nick Dutton asks, 'is now the time the talking stops and the action begins?'

Sustainability is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". So where better than a care home to start making changes, where in the case of elderly care, one generation already cares for another. Indeed, according to previous surveys, over 55s in the UK were much more willing to adopt eco-friendly behaviours than their younger counterparts, with 84% recycling waste materials vs 54% in the 16-24 age group.

It is inevitable that sustainability and green

credentials will become a factor when people are looking at care homes in the future. So, what can we do as care caterers to do our bit for the environment, the future and those we care for?

### WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Producing food accounts for 30% of global greenhouse gases, that's more than all commercial flights combined. So as caterers, the best way to make a difference is to look at our menus and what comes in and goes out of our kitchen doors.

- ▶ **Go seasonal:** Using seasonal produce is a great way to make menus more sustainable – locally sourced and seasonal reduce food miles and also support local businesses, for example – whilst keeping them delicious and full of nutrients. It can also be great for sticking to a budget. You can find some tasty seasonal recipes in previous NACC yearbooks and newsletters (all available on the members section of the website), and future ones too!
- ▶ **Grow your own:** Not only is growing your own fruit, vegetables and herbs sustainable (you don't get lower food miles than your back garden!), it can also be a fantastic way to engage with those you cater for. Care home gardens can be great places for growing the most amazing produce, with residents invested in everything that is grown. They have a real sense of pride and achievement when it is time to harvest and this makes the eating even more appealing and enjoyable.
- ▶ **Review your menus:** Are the ingredients you use sourced sustainably and ethically? Talk with suppliers and source using accreditations, such as LEAF Marque (farm assurance system), MSC Certified (fish) and RSPCA Assured (animal welfare).



- ▶ **Reduce meat:** One of the biggest changes that can be made is to how much meat we consume. Reviewing menus and adding in more plant-based dishes and reducing the amount of meat, especially red meat, can make a huge difference to your carbon footprint. Whilst only 2% of those aged over 55 would become vegan to help to environment, 34% of those surveyed were willing to reduce meat intake. Why not try meat-free days in your care home?

#### GET THE CONVERSATION GOING

Engaging with chefs, residents and care staff about sustainability and their ideas and goals for reducing the carbon footprint makes a huge difference. This is a team effort, and one that can only be solved if the whole word unites. So, start small and work together. If everyone understands what changes are being made and why, it's much more likely to be successful. The buy in for change must include everyone, from senior management all the way down, so it's important that you make your voice heard.

And always celebrate your green achievements! Engage with suppliers and producers to see how they can help. What products are they bringing to market and what are they doing to reduce their own carbon footprint? Talk with smaller, local suppliers too.

#### MAKE A PLAN

Rome wasn't built in day, so we probably can't save the world in a week either. Whilst we need to act fast and act now, the changes we make need to be long term and achievable, with clear goals and attainable targets. It is much easier to change if you know what you are changing, so take time to research your current menus and supply chains. How much food waste do you produce? How many meat-based meals are on your current menu? Does your tender process need a review? It's fine to start small, just as long as you are starting.

#### Research information is from:

[www.aviva.co.uk/aviva-edit/in-the-news-articles/generation-woke-over-55s](http://www.aviva.co.uk/aviva-edit/in-the-news-articles/generation-woke-over-55s)

#### LEARN FROM OTHERS

You aren't alone in trying to create a more sustainable catering provision and there are some passionate organisations out there willing to share their expertise and to help.

- ▶ WRAP's Guardians of Grub food waste campaign has excellent resources and free training courses available for caterers to help reduce food waste.
- ▶ The Soil Association's Food for Life (FFL) has accreditations for FFL Served Here and the Green Kitchen Standard, both with support networks and resources to help care caterers.
- ▶ Sustain – the alliance for food and farming – campaign for a healthy and sustainable food system, which is publicly accountable and socially and environmentally responsible.
- ▶ The PSC100 Group launched the 20% less meat campaign. Public sector catering operators are being encouraged to sign up to the campaign aimed at bringing the amount of meat on their menus down by 20% across schools, hospitals, universities and care homes.