



# HACKING SUSTAINABILITY





## HOW CHEFS CAN HELP BUILD A BETTER FOOD SUPPLY

BY AMELIA LEVIN





Everything is quiet at the start.

The stainless steel work tables are bare, with just the hint of a rising sun beginning to flood into the kitchen. There's a container of bright magenta- and white-striped string beans, another one of foraged mushrooms and mason jars filled with dried beans, all waiting to be used.

Slowly, more chefs enter the space and get to cooking — chopping herbs, simmering stocks, scaling fish and smiling at each other as they share the fresh ingredients. Later, they're seen sitting in a room, passionately talking to each other, waving their hands and writing down notes during what appears to be a very vibrant brainstorming session.

This is a video produced by the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2) Advocacy Hub showing how 18 chefs from around the world came together in January 2018 at Omved Gardens in London to lay the groundwork for the “Chefs’ Manifesto,” a list of eight highly actionable items that foodmakers can do — now — to build a more sustainable food supply for generations to come — and one cultivated from input by more than 100 chefs from 36 countries.

“The Chefs’ Manifesto came about because I wondered to myself, ‘What if chefs could direct me to something on their menu that not only tastes good, but also generates good for the farmer, the planet and for me?’” says Paul Newnham, a community development guru and coordinator at the SDG2 Advocacy Hub, which is an initiative focused on connecting the private and public sectors in campaigns and advocacy with the goal of achieving a more sustainable global food system by 2030. “Chefs know that what we eat matters on many levels. Not only are nutrition and taste paramount to their businesses, but access to sufficient food for all without compromising the health of our planet is also increasingly recognized as a responsibility of the



food industry. As these factors become ever more intertwined within our food system, there must be an immediate global shift towards sustainable production of food to improve the health of all people and the planet.”

Indeed, in this food-obsessed age, chefs have a unique power when it comes to setting positive examples and getting consumers, growers, businesses and even governments to follow suit. By taking the lead on sustainability issues, such as tackling food waste and sustainable sourcing, chefs have the power to curate a new global conversation about food and translate sustainability goals into accessible actions in their kitchens, classrooms and communities.

At the same time, we hear about our world getting warmer by the day. We know we shouldn't just mindlessly throw all of our scraps into the trash. We know we should choose more sustainable protein choices. But with so much information flying around — some of it confusing or contradictory — it's





hard to know where to start, or how to move forward. Trying to be a more “sustainably-minded” chef can simply feel overwhelming.

That’s where things like the Chefs’ Manifesto come in, offering simple action steps in eight areas, including ingredients grown with respect for the earth and its oceans; protection of biodiversity and improved animal welfare; investment in livelihoods; value of natural resources and reduction of waste; celebration of local and seasonal food; a focus on plant-based ingredients; education on food safety, healthy diets and nutritious cooking, and nutritious food that is accessible and affordable for all. Newnham says SDG2 Advocacy Hub continues to work on building this network of sustainably-minded chefs.

Certainly, the Chefs’ Manifesto is not the be-all and end-all in terms of how to nurture a more sustainable business, but

it’s a great framework with clear steps to take and a good place to start. With that in mind, we asked a few other chefs to help develop our own list of easy first steps to take in order to “hack” our current food systems and age-old traditions and drive change toward a more sustainable, less wasteful food future.

## CELEBRATE BIODIVERSITY

Sourcing local food is nothing new. Neither is foraging or working with local foragers, but the more chefs plate these “non-commercial” foods, the more awareness they create around some of the problems with our big agriculture systems.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) reported last year that 91 percent of Americans surveyed do not realize that the global food system is the primary driver of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, accounting for one third of greenhouse gas emissions, and is the single greatest user of land (nearly 40 percent) and fresh water (nearly 70 percent).

## PICKING UP THE PIECES

Restaurateurs Jacques and Tracy Klempf in July 2014 purchased a crumbling Jacksonville, Florida landmark known as the Bostwick Building, built in 1902. An intensive three-year renovation process in partnership with Danis, Design Cooperative and Breaking Ground Contracting brought to life the Cowford Chophouse, a high-end steakhouse with sustainability in its bones.

“We believe that a sustainable approach to restoring the building would be in the best interest of the community, employees and owners,” Tracy Klempf says.


The renovations focused on sustainability and energy savings paid off, as the Cowford Chophouse is now one of the few independent restaurants in the country to earn LEED Silver certification after the hallmarks of the United States Green Building Council’s rigorous and prestigious program.

“Operating a sustainable restaurant is a challenge, especially one in an adaptive reuse building,” Tracy Klempf says. “However, the team was able to accomplish that goal and achieve the Silver LEED certification, and Cowford’s operations are better for it.”

**Previous spread:** The Cowford Chophouse in Jacksonville, Florida.

**Above, from left:** Views of the Cowford Chophouse rooftop bar and dining room.





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Newnham says his team plans to ramp up work around biodiversity this year. “Most of the challenges of our food system are based on the fact that we rely on the same 30 or so ingredients for the majority of our food,” he says. In fact, the Food and Agriculture Organization found in 1999 that 75 percent of the world’s food is generated from just 12 plants and five animal species. So, while the range of products has widened over the past few decades, the range of crops grown to produce those products has narrowed.

That makes for a very brittle system, where crops are not as disease-tolerant; hence, the need for pesticides and artificial fertilizers, Newnham says. By researching wild and more sustainably-grown ingredients in their regions, chefs can help fuel the demand for a more polyculture-centric food system.

As such, Newnham has worked with chefs to create demand for what he calls “forgotten foods,” those like nutrient-dense and climate-smart ingredients such as millet, amaranth and sorghum, which he says deliver huge benefits for both people and the planet. These grains in particular are also highly adaptable to local environments while also being tasty and nutritious. Native Americans have been cultivating, cooking and eating indigenous foods like these for millennia.

## ADD MORE PLANTS — AND BE PICKY ABOUT PROTEIN

National Geographic once reported that the typical meat-heavy American diet requires 1,320 gallons of water a day to produce, and cutting consumption of animal products in half would reduce the U.S.’s dietary requirements of water by 37 percent.

**Opposite:** Chefs from around the world met in London last year for a cooking and sustainability brainstorming event hosted by Paul Newnham, founder of the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2) Advocacy Hub, where they created “The Chef’s Manifesto.”

This doesn’t mean we have to go without meat, but it’s a wake-up call that might encourage chefs to swap in more plants for protein. “It’s easy to add 10 to 20 percent mushrooms and onions to a burger to cut back on the red meat,” says Jehangir Mehta of Graffiti, Graffiti Earth and Me and You in New York City. Mehta sources meats and eggs produced with the highest levels of animal welfare in mind, something the Chefs’ Manifesto encourages.

There are ways to make vegetables “sexier” on menus. The Chefs’ Manifesto suggests putting plant-based dishes more front-and-center on the menu and training servers to push them; using descriptive, “indulgent” sounding dish titles; highlighting unique ingredients and cooking techniques and avoiding the use of labels like “vegan” and “vegetarian.”

## DO A “DUMPSTER DIVE”

It’s practically unthinkable to realize that we produce so much food in this country, yet, according to the USDA, we waste more than 40 percent of it, all the while, Feeding America tells us 40 million people (including 12 million children) struggle with hunger each year.

Food waste is just one area of the Chefs’ Manifesto but it’s an area that many chefs are finding they have more control over than perhaps they previously thought.

The first step, says Jonathan Deutsch, Ph.D., a chef-instructor at Drexler University in Philadelphia, is to literally look into trash cans to see what’s being thrown away. While there are fancy tools and software on the market to help restaurants and other foodservice operators measure and track food waste, it all starts with open eyes.

Conducting waste audits like these is “like taking the blinders off,” says Deutsch, who led the content development for a new, online course on food waste management through the

James Beard Foundation. During an audit, Deutsch will reduce the number of trash cans in the kitchen and sets out extra “garbage” bowls at each station so staff can separate different peels and scraps for reuse.

## COOK FROM ROOT TO LEAF

After you’ve done your dumpster dive, it’s easy to see you can see what’s being tossed and what could have been reused.

Just like many chefs started on a “whole animal” kick years ago, they’re looking at ways to use once lesser-desired vegetable parts like beet greens, carrot tops and carrot and onion peels that might otherwise end up in the compost bin.

“Cooks are naturally good at this,” says Deutsch, who makes a competition out of using leftovers. Once, a student thought beyond croutons and bread pudding when dealing with leftover bread and compressed it into a sheeter to make a crust for a pot pie. Others have made powders out of nutritious carrot peels and a tartare out of the dark veins carved from tuna steaks. “We call it ‘mindful cooking,’” Deutsch says.

## SOURCE SURPLUS FROM SUPPLIERS

Reusing leftovers and scraps is precisely how Adam Kaye, who spent 12 years as culinary director for Dan Barber’s Blue Hill and Blue Hill Stone Barns, got the idea for his recently-launched consulting company, Spare

Food. During the wildly successful wastED pop-up a few years ago, Kaye and Barber worked with farmers, fisheries, distributors, processors, plant breeders, producers, restaurants and retailers to take in surplus foods, “ugly” produce and otherwise wasted byproducts for a completely “reused” menu featuring rotating guest chefs.

Now, as part of Spare Food and in partnership with his brother Jeremy Kaye, he continues this work with restaurants, hotels and other operators

to work with their suppliers and rethink ingredient sourcing.

“Not every wasted item can be reused but there is so much room for creativity and chefs are good at that,” says Kaye, who has made jams and sauces using surplus and bruised tomatoes and flavorful stock out of extra fish bones otherwise tossed by a

smoked fish processor. He’s even made “burgers” using pulp from leftover cold-pressed juice shops, flavorful soups out of romaine lettuce butts and other dishes using broken nuts from a nut processor. Don’t forget to also buy these things and other products in bulk to cut down on packaging waste.

“We spent about a couple months immersing ourselves in contacting our suppliers to see what they might be throwing away,” says Kaye, who adds that, contrary to what one might think, the suppliers were actually more than happy



**Above:** Paul Newnham

**Opposite, from top:** Chef Adam Kaye uses leftover coffee grinds to make a curing rub for bacon; Adam Kaye





to give back their excess waste rather than pay the extra fees for hauling services.

Deutsch has gotten into the game as well. Thanks to a recent grant, he's been working with food manufacturers to produce what he calls "upcycled" products, such as cheese made from surplus milk, a tomato sauce using the tops and bottoms of tomatoes from a those made from surplus and wasted foods.

"It's really important for chefs to be a part of the conversation around upcycling and it's really gratifying that major food companies are now looking to chefs and culinary educators for guidance in this area," he says.

## CONTROL PORTIONS AND RETHINK MENUING

It's easy to forget that portion sizes have a direct impact on the food waste we create.

"Do we really need a meal that's 1700 calories in one sitting?" says Newnham who suggests the idea of offering half and full size portions for entrees. "It doesn't have to be a kids' meal, but maybe there's a way to think more out of the box when it comes to writing menus."

The small plates "trend" has partially taken care of the portion problem, and many restaurants are rewriting their menus to include more shareable entrée dishes,

like larger pork chops and porterhouse steaks for two or more. Others are making their own super high-quality bread and butter and listing it as an a la carte menu item in a win-win that allows diners to save room for extra starters or dessert while bumping up the tab at the same time.

Mehta looks to specials when it comes to portion control and waste reduction. "People think you have to offer just one or two specials at a time, but why can't we offer more at each sitting so we use up all your ingredients?" he says. He's even gone as far as cooking up a special on the fly using the last bit of a food and offering it up to diners on the spot.

"If they say no thank you, almost certainly someone else will take it," he says. Offering wrong orders to other tables can help cut down on food waste as well.

All these things might seem strange or even "out there," but as more chefs like Mehta, Kaye, Deutsch and others break down this industry's age-old traditions to rethink the way they menu, source and serve, they're helping build a more sustainable food future. In this celebrity chef age, diners and consumers are watching them, and they'll watch and listen to you, too.



Amelia Levin is a Chicago-based food writer, cookbook author and certified chef.



# PIPED DREAMS

Non-traditional fillings allow for fun mashups. | By Jody Shee



Amid America's ongoing love affair with doughnuts, chefs are leaving traditional jelly filling to Dunkin'. Instead, flavor layering and the savory sensibilities of croquettes and dumplings have arrived to doughnuts and doughnut holes.

"Right now, non-traditional things in general are really popular, fun and different," says Andy Rodriguez. He and his wife Amanda Pizarro founded Miami's The Salty Donut. "For the longest time, we were eating more predictably. But there's been a change and progression toward eating things that make us uncomfortable or are from cultures we've never experienced. It's the mashing of two styles or cultures that people wouldn't have done before."

While on a trip to Israel, where Pizarro was inducted into the Forbes 30 Under 30 class of 2018 in food and drink, the couple experienced "extraordinary tahini and halva," Rodriguez says. Thus, upon their return, they partnered with a tahini producer to develop a doughnut filling of tahini pastry cream to fill the hole in a doughnut ring and developed their own halva to crumble on top, finishing with black sesame brittle.

Brioche is the current darling of doughnut dough among culinarians. It's the standard at The Salty Donut for its softer dense and fluffy bread-like nuances, Rodriguez says. The egg and butter flavors pair well with fillings and glazes. One features an espresso cream with lavender honey glaze, and for a touch of spring, it includes dried candied spring flowers on top.

Also popular in spring at The Salty Donut is the Easter egg doughnut. For that, they had a custom cutter made to shape the brioche dough like an egg. They scoop out the dough and fill it with passion fruit and key lime ganache, which is yellow, then dip the whole thing in a standard vanilla bean glaze. Atop the ganache on each doughnut is a white chocolate egg-shaped disc with a hole in the middle so the yellow ganache shows through, creating the appearance of egg yolk.

## Picking flavors

Flavor profiles often come from the chef's background and from the local market, says Gemma Matsuyama, pastry chef at n/naka in Los Angeles. While she is focused on her Japanese heritage right now, she sees a trend with all things Asian and Middle Eastern. As she develops doughnuts, she's playing around with whole grain flours, rice flour and various sugars imported from Japan. One of her doughnut riffs is mochi with a red bean filling including vanilla and butter. She relies on kokuto sugar

**Above:** Honey Lemon Curd and Chrysanthemum Meringue Doughnuts at Stubborn Seed, Miami Beach, Florida.

**Opposite, from left:** The Easter egg doughnut at The Salty Donut is typically filled with passion fruit and key lime ganache; This tahini and halva doughnut finished with black sesame brittle from The Salty Donut was inspired by a trip to Israel.