



CASE STUDY

Grassroots Pantry: A Leader in the Sustainable Restaurant Business



Grassroots Pantry is recognized as an example around the topic of food sustainability

Background Information

Grassroots Pantry is a restaurant and workshop in Hong Kong with a simple philosophy: to create food that heals, meeting the highest culinary standards and using fresh organic local produce wherever possible and plant-based ingredients. Everything they serve is made in-house, over 90% of their ingredients are certified organic and they don't use any refined sugars in the restaurant.

Founded by Peggy Chan in 2012, Grassroots Pantry was established with the objective to change the way we think about food. Where do our meals come from? How are they produced? What impact do our food consumption choices have on our planet?

They are committed to delivering the cleanest, most ethically-produced and nutrient-dense ingredients. They aim to share that knowledge with their community by setting a new standard of healthy living and



increasing awareness of and interest in the farm-to-table, plant-based, sustainable and slow food movement.

Through their dishes, they want to honour those who cultivate our land and minimise our carbon footprint by sourcing as locally as possible. They remain transparent in their cooking processes, and demand that traceability, a circular economy system and, preferably, a regenerative agriculture system is integrated into their business.

Approach, Delivery, & Challenges

What does it mean to source sustainably nowadays? Some businesses don't walk the walk, they just talk the talk. Grassroots Pantry wants to do both and be as transparent as possible in the process.

They source as local and organic wherever possible. Over 90% of their menu is sourced this way and they have formed strong relationships with Hong Kong farmers. If the farmers harvest imperfect fruits and vegetables, they take them at a discounted rate and turn them into soups, juice, jams and fermented foods. Rather than have this produce end up in landfill and the farmers receive no income from it, they can provide them with payment as well as make some tasty food for their guests: a win-win.

Late last year Grassroots Pantry released their first sustainability report. They want to be as transparent as possible with their guests, as well as stakeholders and shareholders, and hold their suppliers to a high standard. They ask for no Styrofoam or plastic bags with their fruit and vegetable orders (and if they do arrive with this packaging, they are sure to let their suppliers know and recycle or return this to the nominated bin or service point). They ask that their waste disposal company supply them with data to understand where it's going, as well as their recyclable pickups.

A summary of their sustainability report is displayed on their tables as tent cards and often prompts conversations between staff and guests. Educating guests on separation of waste, waste disposal and using every edible part of produce is an aspect that is often overlooked by many in the industry.

To read their 2018 Sustainability Report, follow the link [here](#).

To read an infographic summary, follow the link [here](#).

In addition, they run the restaurant as a social enterprise and as an education platform to inspire and raise awareness of what can be created with plant-based ingredients. Through their menus, they aim to educate their guests about their food and mission. Their menus contain a glossary that includes descriptions and definitions of ingredients as well cooking techniques. The lunchtime bowl is a great example - it categorises food types by their nutritional content ensuring the meal is nutritionally balanced- very important for those concerned about a lack of protein in plant-based dishes.

In addition, they also attempt to use every part of their produce (from fruit to root) to reduce their food cost and take advantage of what is often the most flavourful part of the vegetable. For instance, they do their



Inside their menu – their ethos



own cold-pressed juicing and the leftover carrot pulp goes into their dumplings while the beetroot pulp is used to make energy balls. Leftover mushroom stems can be pickled and made into sauces and soups while cabbage stems can be reduced into purees, soups and dumplings. Nothing goes to waste!

Another big focus in recent years has been educating the next generation of eco-warriors. Aside from visiting schools and giving presentations to students, they invite students to tour Grassroots Pantry to understand their ethos and practises, including learning about recycling, waste management and eating for the betterment of the environment.

They also work to educate local chefs. During culinary school, chefs are rarely taught how to make whole foods and plant-based dishes, let alone about how to separate waste or recycle. This lack of education prompted Grassroots Pantry to launch The Collective's Table.

With The Collective's Table, a renowned chef is invited to Grassroots' kitchen to create a collaborative multi-course tasting menu with Executive Chef Peggy Chan. For dinner service on one night only, the guest chef will cook alongside Chef Peggy, each creating a starter, main course and dessert in the style of the guest chef and using only vegetarian ingredients. For the guest chefs, the main challenge is to exit their comfort zones and apply their philosophies to a plant-based arena free of meat, fish and dairy in general.

Education also extends to the staff who have to be trained to not throw everything into the trash. In each working section, they have up to four separate bins for plastic, paper, regular waste and food waste. Through constant reminders and nudges, behaviour change is easy, and their staff members eventually understand the importance of this process that has the bigger picture in mind.



Waste separation in each working station

The restaurant only uses glass bottles for their beverages and offers filtered water to their guests, eliminating the need for water delivery in plastic water containers. They also fill up plastic bottles to avoid people buying another and subsequently adding to the plastic pile up.

Grassroots Pantry and the SDGs

Grassroots Pantry contributes directly to 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in one form or another at both the Goal and Target levels. To read more about the restaurant's contribution to each of these SDGs, follow the link [here](#).



Benefits & Lessons Learned

Perhaps the major lesson learned is to stick to your convictions. While it would be easier for Grassroots Pantry to reduce their costs and source non-organic produce, they will not compromise on this. They support the farmers who are not using chemicals, synthetic fertilisers and pesticides on their crops. Every time they spend a dollar, they are voting for the world they want.

When they first launched Grassroots Pantry, vegetarian food was in its infancy in Hong Kong and plant-based food was almost unheard of. To have survived for over six years is testament to conviction, creativity, and ultimately efficacy of the operation's sustainable practices.

Opportunities & Next Steps

As always, the restaurant strives to educate and empower their guests and staff by raising awareness around challenges pertaining to food sustainability including the importance of local and organic farming. May 2019 marks their seventh year in business so their focus is to continue designing more innovative and creative dishes for their guests. For other aspects of their business, please track their social media handles.

Website(s)

<https://www.grassrootspantry.com/>



Facebook:
@grassrootspantry



Instagram:
@grassrootspantry



Twitter:
@GrassrootsHK

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