



Facilitator — April/May 2012



Change Language: Choose



Text Size A | A | A

All translations are provided for your convenience by the Google Translate Tool. The publishers, authors, and digital providers of this publication are not responsible for any errors that may occur during the translation process. If you intend on relying upon the translation for any purpose other than your own casual enjoyment, you should have this publication professionally translated at your own expense.

A Reputation of INTEGRITY

Sherleen Mahoney

Chipotle blazes a trail of sustainability

For Steve Eells, the founder and CEO of Chipotle, cooking and restaurants have always been his passions. Initially planning to become a chef, he enrolled at the Culinary Institute of America. Eells had no idea this traditional path would eventually lead him into the nation's spotlight.

After graduation, he serendipitously landed a job at one of his favorite restaurants, Stars, in San Francisco. There, he learned to refine his palette and critically taste food.

While in San Francisco, he was inspired by the taquerias in the Mission area and aspired to open his own burrito shop that depicted his own sense of style and flair. With a modest loan from his parents, Eells left San Francisco to open the first Chipotle in Colorado in 1993.

"When I told my friends and family that I was leaving Stars to go open a burrito shop in Colorado, they thought I was crazy," Eells said. "But I had a very strong vision for the way Chipotle was going to look and taste and feel. I knew it wasn't going to be a typical fast-food restaurant; it was going to incorporate everything I learned at the Culinary Institute and Stars and elevate fast food."

With his limited budget, Eells chose a vacated Dolly Madison ice cream shop near the University of Denver. He designed the architecture using simple and accessible parts from a local hardware store, such as plywood, barn metal and conduit. Once the flagship Chipotle was open, serving authentic ingredients—rice, beans, meats and salsa—wrapped in giant tortillas, it didn't take long for it to become wildly successful.

A year and a half later, Eells opened the second Chipotle in Denver, which was met with even greater success.

Continued Success

Since the first Chipotle opened in 1993, the company has experienced phenomenal growth. One hundred and fifty restaurants were opened in 2011, which brings the total to 1,230. This year, Chipotle plans to open between 155 and 165 new restaurants. For someone who had no intentions of opening more than one restaurant, Eells has created the best-rated Mexican fast-food chain in the country.

At the heart of Chipotle's appeal and success is its commitment to serve great-tasting food in a way that is accessible and affordable to everyone, while creating a unique and compelling dining experience. Diners enjoy deliciously braised carnitas or barbacoa, adobo-marinated and grilled chicken or steak or vegetarian options while knowing the ingredients are naturally raised from local sources, without antibiotics or growth hormones, at fast-food prices.

The Root of Integrity

In 1999, Eells learned how most pork is raised in the United States—mostly on factory farms and in confinement—and sought to find a different way.

Eells was inspired by an article in *The Art of Eating* magazine, which introduced him to the Niman Ranch Pork Co, a group of independent family farms in Iowa that produces naturally raised pork. Owner Bill Niman focuses on raising vegetarian-fed pigs without the use of antibiotics.

As Eells witnessed a growing consumer interest in local food, organic produce and naturally raised meat, he

decided to try this approach with his own project.

It wasn't easy at first. In 1999, the company could not easily find suppliers that met these standards. But with applied pressure, sometimes resorting to guilt tactics, more ranchers began complying by naturally raising their animals.

Today, Chipotle is able to purchase much of their beef and chicken from ranchers who meet or exceed naturally raised standards. The company has not yet achieved their goal of 100-percent naturally raised beef and chicken, like it accomplished with pork in 2010, but they're actively working on it.

Chipotle also is striving to increase the purchase percentage of organically grown beans and dairy from pasture-raised cows.

Though it's not always possible or practical to source all the ingredients locally, Chipotle strives to do as much as possible. This bold and successful initiative led to the release of Chipotle's mission statement in 2001 called Food with Integrity, which boasts the fact that Chipotle serves more naturally raised meat than any other fast-casual restaurant.

Driven by this movement, Eells took his message to Congress, where he would lead the charge to change meat production in this country.

"The sources we prefer tend to be smaller, niche suppliers, and we need a great deal of everything we serve," said Chris Arnold, the Communications Director for Chipotle. "It would be a whole lot easier if other restaurant companies would follow our lead; the supply would certainly shift in the same direction we are going. Regardless of what happens, we have committed to finding better, more sustainable sources for everything we use."

A Green Commitment

Since Chipotle is so committed to family farmers, it created a nonprofit foundation to support sustainable farming practices.

The Chipotle Cultivate Foundation supports organizations for family farms, food education programs for younger generations, and ranchers and farmers who are developing more sustainable practices.

In 2011, Chipotle pledged to purchase more than 10 million pounds of fruits and vegetables grown within 350 miles of the restaurants where they will be served, doubling its commitment of 5 million pounds in 2010. This year, Chipotle expects to double the number of locally grown produce it serves.

In addition to the foundation, Chipotle also supports organizations that seek to improve food practices and the environment. The company has donated more than \$2 million to various groups, such as Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution, The Nature Conservancy, FamilyFarmed.org, The Lunch Box and the Niman Ranch Scholarship Fund.

"For more than a decade, we have been working to improve the nation's food supply by finding more sustainable sources for all of the ingredients we use in our restaurants," Eells said in a press release. "By creating the Chipotle Cultivate Foundation, we are extending our reach beyond our restaurants and will be supporting organizations and people that are working to improve individual family farms, animals and the environment, and youth and education programs."

In October 2011, Chipotle hosted Cultivate Chicago, the company's first one-day festival that celebrates wholesome food.

The festival sought to introduce people to sustainable food, as well as educate them about food issues. Approximately 17,000 attendees enjoyed live music, sampled and purchased local artisan foods, and enjoyed craft ales and organic wines. The event also featured celebrity chefs, such as Michael Chiarello and Amanda Freitag from "The Food Network," and notable Chicago chefs, such as Paul Kahan and Tony Mantuano, who demonstrated cooking techniques and shared their passions for sustainable food preparation on two stages.

This year, Chipotle plans to host the festival in Denver and Chicago.

Green Expansion

Chipotle is built on the foundation of integrity.

In 2011, Chipotle expanded the direction of sustainability companywide. From inception, sustainability has always been a driving force, but a new directive has broadened the scope for new and existing restaurants, and company processes.

A new resource for employees and customers was created in order to better direct comments and questions to

internal staff, who are knowledgeable about sustainability in every discipline.

"We do things for the right reason, not marketing strategy," said Carolyn Roberts, the Director of Facilities at Chipotle. "Every department is aligned with integrity, and sustainability is in our minds always."

With this expansion came new goals. One of those is to work with their waste management company, SLM, a provider of comprehensive facility management that includes waste removal and recycling services, to ensure Chipotle's single-stream recycling is not shipped overseas and is only handled in the United States.

"From a 'right-thing-to-do perspective,' why pay to ship waste to China when we have companies in the United States that can repurchase recyclable materials from China to make U.S. products?" Roberts said. "We want to operate with the full-circle mentality in that what goes out of the restaurants as waste can be repurposed into products that come back into the restaurants. It also allows for U.S. companies to save revenue and dedicate it to those expanding their operations, thereby creating more jobs and a better economic model."

Another initiative is to start using compostable bowls. "We have worked diligently to find a compostable bowl that is both PLA/Corn plastic-free and made domestically right here in the United States, using the same local sustainable farming practices we support on our food purchasing side," Roberts said. "We are also working with our current supplier, who uses 100-percent post-consumer newspaper to make our bowls. We expect that we will have a solution in place soon."

Chipotle also uses unbleached tray liners, and napkins and cups made from postconsumer waste.

In general, Chipotle has already expanded its composting efforts by 150 percent. Today, 300 restaurants are composting, and the goal is to increase the number to 600 by the end of the year.

The Good Fight

In its commitment to sustainability, in 2009, Chipotle partnered with Houston-based Standard Renewable Energy to install solar panels on 27 approved Chipotle restaurants.

"Our effort to change the way people think about and eat fast food began with our commitment to serving food made with ingredients from more sustainable sources, and that same kind of thinking now influences all areas of our business," Ellis said in a press release. "Today, we're following a similar path in the way we design and build restaurants, looking for more environmentally friendly building materials and systems that make our restaurants more efficient."

Currently, 18 restaurants generate solar energy, including those in Denver, Austin, Dallas and San Antonio. In late 2010, the decision was made to discontinue the solar program due to roadblocks and operational issues, such as the significantly lowered or eliminated government rebates and landlord issues. Many Chipotle restaurants are tenants as opposed to privately owned. The landlords had the final say on solar panel installations, and the majority declined.

All completed projects remain fully operational. Conservatively, these locations avoid 10,000 pounds of carbon dioxide annually per store. This is the equivalent of planting more than 300 new trees or taking 260 cars off the road for one day. Chipotle will continue to focus their time, energy and resources on other more-viable areas of development, such as green building.

Sustainability By Design

Chipotle was the first restaurant to receive Platinum-level LEED certification. The Gurnee, Ill., restaurant is conveniently located near public bus stops and uses materials with a high solar reflective index. To maximize water efficiency, a 2,500-gallon underground cistern captures rainwater from the roof for landscape irrigation, and high-efficient pre-rinse sprayer, faucets, toilets, urinals, ice machines and water heaters were installed.

For energy efficiency, an on-site 6-kilowatt wind turbine supplies clean, renewable energy to the restaurant, and the restaurant is completely outfitted with LED lamps. An energy management system monitors all major building systems—HVAC, wind turbine, water heater, make up air, hood and lights—and keeps daily performance records that are available online. These daily reports support facilities as they continue to provide maintenance while ensuring the critical building systems are operational. The second LEED-certified Chipotle restaurant is in Minnetonka, Minn.

One Love

As Chipotle continues to evolve, a new vision was needed to update brand identity and the company's ongoing dedication to simple, people-responsive design. Chipotle rebranded their restaurant design two years ago, considering sustainability in every phase of design and construction.

"The concept is to apply the same practices we use with our food: use simple materials, creatively assembled, to

generate a design statement much more sophisticated than the separate elements," said Michael Ulm, Development and Design Director at Chipotle.

Just like with their food vendors, Chipotle sources material vendors and fabricators that follow sustainable practices when possible. For the interior of each restaurant, farmed plywood and hotrolled, high-recycled-content steel were fabricated and assembled to create clean geometric designs and material finishes. Wood and reengineered light fixtures warm the interior and create different visual experiences throughout the day and night.

The new kitchen design follows the same concept. Recycled white tiles and carefully directed lighting put the focus on preparing, cooking and serving food. The new layout lowers the number of steps required to carry out tasks, and the new placement of food and utensils is optimized for every workstation, which includes prepping, cooking or serving.

At each new site, demolition debris is recycled when possible; lighting and kitchen equipment, along with plumbing fixtures, are specified to save energy and natural resources; and paints, adhesives and solvents are evaluated for low VOC content.

"We are currently evaluating how to best bring this design statement to our existing restaurants," Ulm said. "Part of this effort is running through a series of scenarios and understanding how our new concept works with existing layouts. Changes in space planning priorities may not translate directly back to our earlier layouts. Once we have thoroughly evaluated how to bring our new thought process to earlier generations of our restaurants, we will proceed."

Chipotle also has completed several carbon footprint studies to further understand how they can continue to reduce greenhouse gases and post-consumer waste.

"Sustainability is one part of how we think about everything," Ulm said. "We want to harvest, prepare, cook and serve our food as sustainably as possible. Our development follows the same footsteps. We want to be great stewards of the earth and are mindful of our actions upon it."

[View All Articles](#)
