

Diners may be willing to pay more to eat at 'green' restaurants

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Many U.S. restaurants may be ignoring a desire by American consumers to dine at environmentally friendly restaurants, according to a small exploratory study.

Researchers found that more than 8 out of 10 restaurant patrons surveyed in Columbus said they would be willing to pay more to dine at "green" restaurants. More than 7 out of 10 said it was good for restaurants to protect the environment.

The only problem is that very few restaurants market themselves as "green" or environmentally friendly, said Jay Kandampully, co-author of the study and professor of consumer sciences at Ohio State University.

"It is clear that green practices could be beneficial for restaurants. Customers want their restaurants to be environmentally friendly and say they're willing to pay more for it," Kandampully said.

"It would be a shame if restaurants don't make use of that support."

The study appeared in a recent issue of the journal *Tourism and Hospitality Research*.

Kandampully and his colleagues surveyed 455 customers of five independent casual dining restaurants in Columbus. Customers were asked a variety of questions about their perceptions of green restaurants.

The results made it clear that restaurant customers are intrigued by the possibility of environmentally friendly restaurants, said Franziska Schubert, a study co-author who conducted the research while a graduate student at Ohio State.

"We thought there would be some interest in green restaurants, but this showed an overwhelming interest in the concept and a willingness to pay for it," Schubert said.

About 65 percent of those surveyed said they would be willing to pay up to 10 percent more to dine at green restaurants, and 20 percent would be willing to pay even more. Only about 15 percent said they would not be willing to pay any more to eat at an environmentally friendly restaurant.

About 70 percent said it is good for restaurants to protect the environment, and nearly half – 48 percent – said dining at green restaurants will be healthier.

Overall, participants in the survey were most interested in restaurants that took actions to protect the environment, such as reducing energy usage and waste and using biodegradable or recycled products.

"The problem is that most of these actions are not visible to diners," Schubert said. "The customers don't see what is happening in the kitchen and that is one reason why people are unsure if a particular restaurant is green."

The second most important green practice to diners, after environmental action, was the use of organic products and serving locally grown food.

Least important to diners was having restaurants donate some of their profits to environmental projects or pay fees to reduce their ecological footprint.

There were some age and gender differences in how diners viewed green practices at restaurants.

Women and those aged less than 35 were more likely than others to believe dining at green restaurants would be healthier.

Those under 35 were also more likely than older people to say it was important for restaurants to use organic foods and to pay fees to reduce their ecological footprints.

Women were much more likely than men to say it was important for restaurants to donate to environmental projects.

There was one thing that nearly all participants agreed on.

"Customers made it clear that the quality of food was most important for them, and they were not willing to compromise quality to eat at a green restaurant," Kandampully said.

Survey participants also expressed confusion about which restaurants in the area were truly "green," he said.

"Restaurants that engage in green practices should market themselves that way, using that fact as a competitive edge," Kandampully said.

"The responses clearly showed that if people knew which restaurants were green, they would consider visiting them."

Kandampully said restaurants that are truly green should look to get certified by organizations such as the Green Restaurant Association or the Rainforest Alliance to show customers of their commitment.

"[Restaurants](#) need to clearly communicate with customers about their

green practices, if they hope to get a marketing edge," he said.

Provided by The Ohio State University

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