

Are you a responsible diner?

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October 8, 2017



In Photo: Assorted Philippine food

MORE and more Filipinos are now willing to spend hard-earned money to satisfy their craving for delicious food, which is giving the local tourism industry a boost.

Moreover, in search of healthier options, many are going back to the basics—from fast food to slow food.



Sinigang na baboy (Pork tamarind soup)

Players in the hotel and restaurant industry, hence, should take advantage of this trend and help shape the food-service industry toward sustainable tourism, environmental solution provider World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-Philippines) said.

Launching its project, dubbed “The Responsible Diner: A Key Ingredient to Sustainable Tourism”, on September 26, WWF-Philippines held a forum to tackle ways on how to influence policy-makers, players in food service industry and the Filipino public to adopt a policy and the practice of sustainable consumption and production (SCP).

What is sustainable dining?

For WWF-Philippines, sustainable dining is eating in restaurants with food ingredients that come from environment-friendly sources and operating in a sustainable manner.

Basically an information, education, communication and advocacy campaign, the project aims to address the challenges of coping with the forecasted growth in the tourism sector and take the opportunity to highlight and enhance the Filipino cuisine and to ensure sustainable tourism.



In Photo: June M. Alvarez (left), executive director of the Philippine Center for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development Inc., and Raoul Roberto P. Goco, executive chef of

Degustation Restaurant Group and a board member of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of the Philippines.

The project is pushing for a food-service policy review in the tourism sector to foster cooperation among policy-makers and integrate the concept of SCP into national and local multisectoral development plans.

The restaurants are encouraged to incorporate sustainability into their long-term goals, train and influence their staff to practice SCP and provide consumers with sustainable dining options.

For the consumers, they are urged to help spread awareness on the environmental impacts of the food-service industry, encourage other diners to support sustainable dining, and uphold the practice of sustainable approaches in their daily lives.

Food lovers

Filipinos love to eat. They even seek the latest food trend in social-media platforms, dine out in search of delicious food to satisfy their craving for healthy and delicious food options, WWF-Philippines said.

This passion for food is slowly shifting back from fast food to slow food, said June M. Alvarez, executive director of the Philippine Center for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development Inc. (PCEPSDI).



Kare-kare

During the forum, Alvarez said members of the Generation Y, or the so-called millennials, are leading the way to this shift, with its choice of food that is healthier and produced in a much environment-friendly way.

“My colleagues in the office are millennials. Every time we have overtime, they request me to provide local food. They talk about local food,” he said.

While the trend of “going back to the basics” is happening, on a larger scale, problems of wasteful eating, as well as unsustainable dining, persist.

Citing various data, according to WWF, in the Philippines, 308,000 tons of rice go to waste every year.

Ironically, it also said 2.7 million Filipino families were reported as hungry in 2016.

Changing market behavior

The campaign intends to change the market behavior toward sustainability to address the problems caused by the current practice of Filipinos on food, their eating habits, choice of food and dining experience.

“We intend to change the behavior of the public in general toward food. If you are aware and you know what will be better for everybody, you will demand [for] it. If there is demand for it, the industry will adjust demand for sustainability,” said Jose Angelito Palma, president and CEO of WWF-Philippines during a conference to highlight the event’s objectives.

He said the trend in sustainability is not just for the environment, but for the community and the different stakeholders.

Eco-labeling

Alvarez said the PCEPSDI, the administrator of the National Eco-labeling Programme-Green Choice Philippines, urged companies to seek accreditation to be labeled as an eco-friendly business establishment.

He said promoting SCP is not only about being environment-friendly but is also helping businesses become more sustainable.

“Given our criteria, we can promote sustainability,” he said. Eco-labeling promotes not only products but services, as well,” he added.

Climate change

Assistant Secretary Rommel Antonio O. Cuenca, deputy executive director of the Climate Change Commission, underscored the importance of reducing food wastage in the fight against climate change.

Citing a Food and Agriculture Organization report, Cuenca said one-third of annual food production go to waste.

“Connect that with how much food go to waste and the carbon footprint of the agriculture sector. How much water is needed to produce the food we eat? Every food you waste impacts on the climate,” he added.

It is important to look at the demand and production sides to reduce food waste to help mitigate climate change, he said.

Green practices

Christopher Baylon, operations manager of Nurture Wellness Village, said sustainability should be integral into their business operations.

Reducing kitchen waste and proper disposal of waste is institutionalized in Nurture Wellness, he said.

“In our resort, we are doing sustainable practice. We have 30 [kilograms (kg)] to 40 kg of kitchen food waste a day,” to address the problem, they decided to practice waste segregation and composting.

Reducing waste, he said, actually saves them from the cost of the waste disposal alone. The resort reduces production costs and save money by using the recycled materials as decorations.

Going local

Raoul Roberto P. Goco, executive chef of Degustation Restaurant Group and a board member of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of the Philippines for

the Restaurant Sector, said as a chef he makes it a point to use local ingredients that are organic and seasonal.

“Before, you draw up your menu then go around and look for suppliers or importers. What I am doing now is I look at the market. I look at what’s available. From there, we taste the ingredients then make the menu,” he said.

He encourages hotel and restaurant chefs to be more creative and make use of local ingredients as opposed to using imported ones that are more expensive and hard to find.

“We have beautiful *patis* [fish sauce], *bagoong* [fermented small fish or shrimps], vegetables. We have pro-biotic chickens. It is about time for chefs to look and cook seasonal, and cook local using local ingredients, and experiment with new techniques on how to preserve or highlight anything.”

He added: “Cook our local cuisine. That is the only way we can be recognized by the world. Tourists go for Filipino food and they deserve incredible Filipino food,” he said.

By using local ingredients, chefs also help the Filipino farmers—the ultimate food producers—to survive.

“I also hope we can teach farmers on modern sustainable techniques,” he said.

Growing trend

Jen Horn of Muni, a company that promotes events to encourage public behavior in the shopping, eating and traveling toward sustainability, said shaping the market will require education of both the consumers and producers.

“One thing we can do as consumers and community leaders is to share the benefits of consuming the kind of goods that will help shape consumer behavior by educating the public,” he said.

A study conducted by PCEPSDI some years back revealed that 70 percent of the market is willing to go for environment-friendly solutions and 90 percent of that are willing to buy “green” products, including food, Alvarez said.

He said the food-service industry has to offer value propositions in coming up with its products or menu, again, emphasizing the millennials as a big market.

“Millennials may have low-spending power but they have the critical mass. They go for organic. They are shunning fast food; they are going back to the basics local food,” he said.

“From the business point of view, SCP and efficient processing can be converted into cash,” he added.

“So how do you make it efficient if you have the same value, the same market? [Through] efficiency. We can present that to the stakeholders from the point of view of the co-operators,” he said.

Slow food vs fast food

Goco said 20 years ago, Filipinos cooked at home using local ingredients available in the market.

The tinola and other Filipino dishes, he said, are actually slow food, until fast food became a necessity as the Filipinos become too busy. It kept people away from cooking at home, which is “unhealthy”.

“From the restaurant point of view, I tell my customers the health benefits and sumptuous dishes in slow-food preparation,” he said.

Against fast food, slow food is much healthier and delicious. Even the local *carinderia* (eatery or roadside food stalls), Goco said, offer sumptuous meals because of the manner they were prepared and cooked.

He said the *turo-turo* (eatery), which uses local ingredients, traditional practices, as opposed to industrial techniques in cooking, is better and can be considered “slow food, served-fast” type of food service.

“If only we can make it sanitary, it’s the way to go, much better than eating in fast food which is industrial food,” he said.

Better option

Both the Filipino dining public and the players in the hotel and restaurant business have better options to help save the planet, according to WWF-Philippines.

“At the end of the day, sustainability makes good business sense,” Palma said.

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