



# GREEN RESTAURANT CERTIFICATION PROGRAM GUIDELINES

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# PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

The “Swing Into Action” Green Restaurant Certification Program is focused on reducing waste and enabling the Little Rock restaurant and greater hospitality industry to be a leader in sustainable operations and care for the environment. Taking care of our environment through practical sustainability efforts affects all Little Rock residents and can improve the quality of life throughout the City.

A partnership between the Little Rock Sustainability Office (LRSO) and the Little Rock Zoo (Zoo), Swing Into Action envisions a prosperous capital city that is waste free and environmentally friendly. This program will address waste-related issues by educating the public on single-use “trash” while empowering restaurants to take inexpensive, waste-reducing actions. The LRSO and Zoo will work with the Little Rock Sustainability Commission (LRSC) and other local groups to manage the program and aims to enhance and support Little Rock’s restaurant industry.

Swing Into Action will recognize businesses in the food service industry that are working to reduce their waste “footprint,” including food trucks, distributors, caterers, and restaurants! These program guidelines identify the requirements for each of three certification levels (tiers) and provide guidance and information to help businesses qualify at each tier.

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Learn more about the City of Little Rock’s sustainability goals and initiatives here:

[www.littlerock.gov/residents/sustainability-office/](http://www.littlerock.gov/residents/sustainability-office/)

# WELCOME LETTER

To Our Foodservice Community:

The Little Rock Zoo is committed to inspiring people to value and conserve our natural world. As a part of that commitment we strive every day to be better stewards of our planet. As one of the largest family attractions in Arkansas and an important place for education we work to spread the word about sustainable practices. Living a sustainable life impacts the natural world around us and the animals that share our world. As such, the Zoo is committed to sustainable practices in its operation and we encourage our community to join with us in the same pursuit.

Building a sustainable future takes building a community of partners and we are proud to partner with the City of Little Rock Sustainability Office, Trio's Restaurant, and a wide variety of other partner organizations to offer the "Swing Into Action" Sustainable Restaurants program. It is our hope that you will find this program resourceful and insightful. Sustainability is a process and the "Swing Into Action" program allows every organization to comfortably participate as they choose.

The more we learn and the more we work together, the easier sustainability becomes. We are excited that you are joining us!



*Susan Altrui*

SUSAN ALTRUI  
Director of the Little Rock Zoo



# CERTIFICATION LEVELS



## Tier 1, SUSTAINABLE FOUNDATION:

- Intro to Sustainability
- Ask First Policies
- Easy “Green” Activities
- ReThink Food Waste
- To-Go Containers - Tier 1



## Tier 2, SUPER SUSTAINABLE:

- Super Sustainability
- Recycling Policy
- Increased “Green” Activities
- Composting 101
- To-Go Containers - Tier 2



## Tier 3, SUSTAINABILITY EXCELLENCE:

- Excellence in Sustainability & Resilience
- EnergyStar Upgrades
- Towards Zero Waste
- Plant-based for Health & the Environment
- To-Go Containers - Tier 3

*Unlike many other “Green” certification programs, the GRCP aims to make participation easy. The steps and actions are straight-forward, but can have big, positive impacts on our city, the environment, and your business operations.*

*Every food service business in Little Rock deserves the opportunity to be recognized as environmentally friendly without complicated rules or costly requirements.*

# BENEFITS OF CERTIFICATION

*While being beneficial for the environment, it also enhances Little Rock's restaurant scene and helps you reenvision your business with a sustainable future!*

- 🌱 Increased Community Presence
- 🌱 Improved, Sustainable Operations
- 🌱 Stronger Relationships with Customers
- 🌱 Awareness of Important Industry Trends
- 🌱 Savings from Waste/Energy Help Offset Costs
- 🌱 Expanded Customer Base & Marketing Opportunities

## GETTING CERTIFIED



Training is provided for owners and/or managers (or a representative may attend on behalf of your restaurant) at the Little Rock Zoo (virtual available). Contact Brittany Nichols in the Little Rock Sustainability Office at 501-371-4646 for information on training or other aspects of program operations (e.g., direct support, “how-to” help, and signage for staff training).

When you have met the set of requirements for a specific tier, contact the LRSO to schedule a review and certification walk-through. Upon completion of a specific tier by your business the GRCP will provide materials that can be used to display your certification (e.g., static clings for your business entry/doors and marketing graphics). The completed tier level of your business will also be recognized on the websites and social media pages of the City of Little Rock, Little Rock Zoo, and other media partnerships as they develop! Upon completion of Tier 3 certification, your business will automatically be nominated for the annual Sustain the Rock awards.

# TIER 1 OVERVIEW



## SUSTAINABLE FOUNDATION



### **Ask First Policy:** Straws, Water, Plastic Utensils, Plastic Bags, Condiment Packets, Prioritize Reusable Items (“Here” vs To-Go containers)

Example: *When you serve drinks to dine-in customer, ASK if they would like a straw. This will lead to fewer straws used and more money saved. Also, don't offer to-go drinks to dine-in customers unless specifically requested.*



### **Recycling Policy:** Cardboard, Metal Cans, Paper, Plastic Bottles, and Glass. Back of House Policy with option to include Front of House.

Example: *Large containers used during meal prep might be recyclable! Check for the chasing arrows on plastic jugs and jars indicating*



### **Food Policies:** Collect pre-consumer food and untouched packaged foods for donation to local food recovery systems. Begin recipe planning to incorporate vegetarian (meat-free) and vegan (meat, egg and dairy-free) options.

Example: *If you ordered too much food from a vendor or had a menu change and know it can't be used, donate the excess to Potluck Food Rescue who will distribute it!*



### **To-Go Containers:** Allow customers to “B.Y.O.C” (Bring Your Own Containers!), Start Phasing Out Styrofoam (measure costs and identify waste to create strategy)

Example: *If you serve coffee, especially to-go, advertise and incentivize using your customers' reusable coffee mugs and thermoses.*



### **Fats, Oils, & Grease Policy:** Post Signs above every sink

Example: *Train all employees on proper F.O.G. procedures - signs will remind them to not pour any oils or grease down the drains.*

# TIER 1 PRACTICES



**ASK FIRST POLICY.** The goal of the ask first policy is not to deny customers items they need or want, but to decrease overall use, profit from the customer behavior change, and prevent the waste that single-use items generate. Employees should ask customers if such items are needed or desired, or they can even wait until receiving a customer request. In both instances, it is good to have signage (e.g., table tents and menu mentions) regarding your “green” policies. Make sure your staff members know the policy and understand how and when (i.e., what are the triggers for asking) to explain these policies to customers. For example, always ask the customer first before assuming they want a glass of water for the table, especially if they order another drink as well. In most cases, signage will help prepare customers and remind staff about your business’s new, green practices. This will help ease the transition away from wasteful, single-use items such as: straws, to-go cups and lids, plastic bags and utensils, and non-recyclable condiment packets that are seldom used. See appendix (a) for the printable list of “Ask First” policies to post in your business.



**RECYCLING.** The GRCP focuses on recycling availabilities in Little Rock as it relates to the materials and items – paper/cardboard, plastic, glass, and metal cans – that your business encounters and uses in its operation. Based on your business model, consider the pros and cons of having various recycling containers available for customers. Consider friendly and effective signage to ensure your customers know what you recycle and what to do with waste items. Learn about Little Rock recycling businesses – contact them for recycling ideas, proposals, and support. Establish recycling services for cardboard, glass, and other recyclable items - See appendix (c) for all local resources.



# TIER 1 PRACTICES



**FOOD.** Consider how unused and unserved food that you generate could be effectively recovered and provided to people in need in the Little Rock area. Contact Little Rock organizations that provide food recovery services to see how they can support your business participation in this valuable social service. See appendix (i) for a list of food recovery programs in Central Arkansas. Including plant-based food items on your menu are good for your patrons health and for the environment!



**TO-GO CONTAINERS.** Allow the use of B.Y.O.C's into your business operations. Understand the processes in moving towards customer-owned containers as it relates to health department codes and regulations. Training will include how to identify and understand the environmental life-cycle of any to-go containers used in your business. Through contact with your food service item vendor(s) and other vendors as it applies, discuss material changes that may be appropriate and possible (e.g., switching from plastic and styrofoam to biodegradable or compostable items). Strongly consider replacing styrofoam with items that are more environmentally friendly and don't release toxins when heated.



**FAT, OILS AND GREASE (FOG).** Ensure your business handles fats, oils and grease in a legal and environmentally sensitive manner, to prevent harmful downstream impacts. Obtain and ensure appropriate signs are in place as a continuous reminder to employees to comply with your FOG requirements. See appendix (g).

# TIER 2 OVERVIEW



## SUPER SUSTAINABILITY



### **Phase Out Single-Use:** Straws, Plastic Utensils, Plastic Bags, Condiment Packets, Continue Prioritizing Reusable Items (“Here” vs To-Go containers)

Example: Consider purchasing reusable to-go bags for customers. Charging a small amount for requested bags will offset costs. Remind customers to bring their own bags when they call in orders for take-out.



### **Recycling Policy:** Cardboard, Metal Cans, Paper, Plastic Bottles, and Glass (Back of House and Front of House!); Compost Food Waste & Compostables

Example: New to composting? Start by collecting basic raw food scraps. It's easy and low-to-no-cost - we provide several resource options for this green policy.



### **Food Policies:** Introduce vegetarian and vegan options onto menu. Begin recipe planning to incorporate Plant-based for Health (vegan fare cooked without oil) options onto the menu. Prioritize Arkansas-Grown and in-season food items.

Example: Let your customers know about the menu expansion that includes new plant-based options. A great way to spread the word is through your restaurant's social media outlets.



### **To-Go Containers:** NO MORE STYROFOAM, Replace with alternatives, Incentivize B.Y.O.C.'s and set up a Packing Station.

Example: Create a station your to-go customers can use to package food served on a plate into their own containers. Highlight customers on social media who pack up their leftovers in their own containers. Provide discounts or a free food item or other merchandise to customers who “B.Y.O.C.”



### **Fats, Oils, & Grease Policy:** Assessment & Vendor

Example: Proper maintenance of your grease trap/interceptor is important! Hire a grease waste hauler with good references and make sure their following all local ordinances.



### **Utility Efficiency:** EnergyStar Lighting Upgrade, Start Up/Shut Down Plan, Water Leak Tests & Repairs, Water Conservation in Landscaping

Example: Switching to EnergyStar Certified lightbulbs will help reduce utility costs, but allowing more natural light (sunlight) will further decrease costs.

# TIER 2 PRACTICES



**PHASE OUT SINGLE-USE PLASTICS.** Explore sustainable alternatives to plastic straws, plates, utensils, bags, and condiment packets you use with your current suppliers/vendors (e.g., reusable, compostable, and biodegradable). Select alternatives that work for your business model, operations, and economics. Use information gathered during Level 1 Certification to inform cost changes (e.g., money saved from not giving out as many straws). Consider low-cost process changes such as more dishwashing, providing refillable, reusable condiment containers, and even NOT offering straws or bags at your establishment. See appendices (k) and (l) for resources.



**RECYCLING.** Continue expanding your recycling program by educating staff and customers and add recycling options for Front of House operations. Address contamination early, as it may impact how you are charged and if your valuable recyclables are sent to the landfill or the MRF (Materials Recovery Facility). Establish Composting Practices. Contact local composting facilities to assess and arrange services. Educate staff and customers on organic waste sorting. Identify any compostable food service items that can be included in your organic waste stream. See appendix (c) for Composting Resources.



**FOOD.** Explore options with your current suppliers to source as local as possible, as often as possible. This may include working with Farmers' Cooperatives, a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) share, and even direct purchases from local farms. This supports up our local economy and cuts down on overall carbon emissions. Visit [arkansasgrown.org](http://arkansasgrown.org) to view local farms and farmers markets in our area. See appendix (h).

# TIER 2 PRACTICES



**TO-GO CONTAINERS.** Based on research accomplished as part of Level 1 actions, eliminate styrofoam items (e.g., to-go containers, cups, and plates) from your business. Incentivize reuse first! By creating a packing station (a dedicated area for take-out orders to be served on reusable plates and transferred by customers to their own containers), you communicate your willingness to change and address the negative impacts of single-use. Replace your to-go containers with sustainable alternatives (recyclable, compostable or reusable).



**FAT, OILS AND GREASE.** Using the guidelines and requirements of the Little Rock Water Reclamation Authority (LRWRA) ensure your FOG-related equipment and processes are proper and effective. Implement and train staff on LRWRA Kitchen Best Management Practices. If your FOG volume warrants, evaluate and hire a qualified grease waste hauler. Contact the Little Rock Water Reclamation Authority at <https://www.lrwra.com/programs/fog/> to learn about the best ways of handling FOG in your business.



**UTILITY EFFICIENCY.** Savings add up when you switch to EnergyStar Certified light fixtures and bulbs. Repair any leaking faucets or running toilets to reduce water usage and save money! Revisit your Start Up/Shut Down procedures with a focus on energy conservation. If you have grass, potted plants, or other landscaping at your establishment, follow water conservation best practices to save money and natural resources! See appendices (f), (m), and (n).

# TIER 3 OVERVIEW

## SUSTAINABILITY EXCELLENCE



**Plastic Free Single-Use:** Only offer compostable or reusable Straws, Utensils, Bags, Condiments; Incentivize Reusable Items

Example: *You use paper straws, unbleached paper bags, and always ask before giving out the compostable utensils wrapped in a paper towel! Your bag or box has a sticker about how to compost these items.*



**Recycling Policy:** Cardboard, Metal Cans, Paper, Plastic Bottles, and Glass (Back of House and Front of House!); Compost Food Waste & Compostables

Example: *Your front-of-house recycling station has a bin for glass, a bin for single-stream recyclables, and you've added a scraping station so customers can compost food scraps with you.*



**Food Policies:** Expand vegetarian, vegan, and Plant-based for Health entree options on your menu; Prioritize local and in-season produce from Arkansas farms.

Example: *You regularly shop and mingle at the nearest Farmers Market during growing season. Your menu reflects this knowledge and shows good food sourcing choices by highlighting certifications.*



**To-Go Containers:** NO MORE STYROFOAM, Replace with compostables; Prioritize B.Y.O.C's and have Dedicated Packing Station.

Example: *You've promoted your Zero Waste initiatives and give away a cookie or appetizer to customers that tag your business in a post about your green practices.*



**Fats, Oils, & Grease Policy:** Following all best practices

Example: *You have a maintenance schedule to check all grease traps/interceptors, train all new staff, and have your waste grease picked up by a processor that recycles the oil.*



**Utility Efficiency:** Appliance & Building Upgrades; Sustainability Plan

Example: *As equipment goes out, replace with highly efficient EnergyStar rated systems. You have developed a Sustainability Plan that addresses energy consumption, waste, water conservation, and more.*

# TIER 3 PRACTICES



**PLASTIC FREE SINGLE-USE.** By now you have a dedicated packing station and have trained your staff and customers on why you no longer offer single-use plastics.



**RECYCLING.** Your recycling program should be thriving at this point and potentially earning you returns if you're a large business. Continue educating customers and staff to keep contamination low in your recycling program.



**FOOD.** Vegan, Vegetarian, and Plant-based for Health Menu Options? Check! Local, seasonal produce? Check! Now you can really explore more sustainable food options by prioritizing the following: Locally grown (< 100 miles), Certified Organic or Naturally Grown produce, Certified Organic and/or Humanely Raised & Handled eggs, meat & dairy, Sustainable Seafood, Certified Bird-Friendly Coffee, among others.



**TO-GO CONTAINERS.** At this point, you no longer use styrofoam products in your business and now offer compostables, recyclable and/or reusable containers instead. You probably offer a discount to those that B.Y.O.C and use your packings station! Collaborating with other Certified Green Restaurants to purchase materials will increase buying power and offer better price breaks.



**FAT, OILS AND GREASE.** Follow all local guidelines and best practices! Collect and sell used cooking oil to be recycled. See appendix (g) for resources.

# TIER 3 PRACTICES



**UTILITY EFFICIENCY.** Install low-flow aerators on hand sink faucets and low-flow units/spray valves in the kitchen sinks. Begin to upgrade equipment such as dishwashers, ice machines, and steam cookers to EnergyStar qualified models to reduce water and energy use by at least 10%. Consider replacing equipment that discharges water continuously (e.g., dipper wells or wok stoves) with efficient models or turn off when not in use. Begin to install WaterSense labeled toilets, bathroom faucets, and urinals where applicable. These products are at least 20% more water-efficient, which equals savings for your business!



Replace traditional paper towels with no heat, energy efficient and high-speed hand dryers in restrooms. This can reduce costs in paper goods, maintenance in restroom upkeep, and waste by up to 95%. Locate refrigerated appliances away from direct sunlight or other sources of heat (i.e., ovens, fryers, stoves). Install motion-sensor light switches in restrooms and offices, helping you avoid the expense of lighting empty rooms.



Create your own Waste Reduction Plan and Clean Energy Plan and share it with us! We would love to hear about what you learn and be able to share those experiences with other restauranteurs. Explore solar power, gray water reuse, reusable to-go container drop off (you wash them and restock them!); there are so many ways you can apply sustainable practices to your business. Thank you for your active role in it!

# THANK YOU.



*Building a prosperous and sustainable city requires everyone's commitment, and by joining this program you have shown tremendous leadership! Other restaurants will look to each other in the coming years, and you will be a leader in this movement Towards Zero Waste. Together we will continue to build a city where future generations will have the opportunity to live, work, play, and thrive while protecting our natural spaces and resources.*

*As the Little Rock Sustainability Commission, we are excited to support your environmental efforts, help grow your business, and celebrate your achievements in the coming months and years.*



*Karen Zuccardi*

KAREN ZUCCARDI  
Little Rock Sustainability Commission, Chair

## LITTLE ROCK SUSTAINABILITY OFFICE

Our office wants you to succeed! Reach out any time with questions or comments about this guide and program.

501-371-4646 | [recycle@littlerock.gov](mailto:recycle@littlerock.gov)

## RESOURCE APPENDIX

The resource appendix will be available to those that enroll in the program. Please contact the Sustainability Office to get more info.