

YOU WON'T KNOW
THE DIFFERENCE

Top off your meal
at Pizza Fusion
with an order of the
homemade, vegan,
gluten-free brownies.



TRIBUNE PHOTO BY DAVID MIDDLECAMP

It's flavorful and Earth-friendly

By KATY BUDGE
Special to The Tribune

It may be a franchise, but Pizza Fusion is a chain with a committed link to Earth-friendly practices and the burgeoning organic movement.

Some may argue that organic has gotten too mainstream, but there's no denying that green is the new black — an approach that's translating into some sustainable, tasty fare at the recently opened Pizza Fusion on Higuera Street in San Luis Obispo.

Owner Brandon Borene's journey to the world of organic food started just a few short years ago when he and wife, Susan Claassen, became the parents of

Organic-minded food and green business practices come together in tasty and responsible symbiosis at Pizza Fusion

twin daughters. Though the couple wasn't really unhealthy, he said, "I realized that my job as a father was to take care of (my daughters) financially and healthwise, and that led us on a quest for a healthier lifestyle, which led us to eating organically."

Borene was also ready for a career change, and because he'd already had some success with an unrelated franchise, he began looking in that direction. He swore, however, that he'd never get involved with food or having

employees, so he kept ignoring the Pizza Fusion ads that repeatedly crossed his path. Nevertheless, as he said, "Here I am!"

While initially drawn to the organic aspect, Borene also came to appreciate that "as a business model, it's so much more than a restaurant."

Indeed, the Earth-friendly facets of Pizza Fusion are abundant. Start with the pizzas, which are crafted from organic, multigrain or gluten-free dough that's made fresh daily and

hand-stretched to form the restaurant's signature 18-by-9-inch ovals.

The restaurant's 11 specialty pizzas range from Traditional Cheese to Organic Pepperoni, a Farmers Market veggie to a BBQ Chicken, a Four Cheese and Roasted Garlic to a Greek pizza of which "Zeus would approve." You can also create your own from a variety of mainly organic toppings.

Salads such as Pear and Gorgonzola or Caprese are available, in addition to bread sticks, a Portobello Grill sandwich and a sandwich with your choice of hormone-free meat. For

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dessert, enjoy "Newman's Own" Organic Chocolate Chip Cookies or a homemade, vegan, gluten-free brownie "that's so good, that's all we serve," Borene said. Nonalcoholic drinks include Boylan's sodas, Honest Teas and Guayaki maté, a tealike beverage. The potent potable list features local favorites Firestone and Central Coast Brewing on tap, and organic wines and an increasing number of certified sustainable local wines.

As a franchise owner, Borene is given considerable leeway in choosing such things as the beverages, and — though "we're not allowed to change the menu" — he's encouraged to buy local food products whenever possible, as long as farmers or producers can offer the necessary volume and competitive pricing. Borene also sourced local craftspeople and companies when building the interior of Pizza Fusion, which is built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards and is awaiting organic certification.

The restaurant's interior reads like a wish list of Earth-

PIZZA FUSION

3971 S. Higuera St., Suite 120 (near Trader Joe's), San Luis Obispo 781-8100, www.pizzafusion.com

Hours: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday; delivery available in San Luis Obispo except downtown and Cal Poly campus

The scene: a casual pizzeria that explains its Earth-friendly practices on low-key "Infomatoes" posted throughout the restaurant

The cuisine: Salads and sandwiches are available, but the signature offerings are the oval-shaped pizzas available on organic, multigrain or gluten-free crusts.

Expect to spend: Specialty pizzas are mostly \$14 to \$19 (the Bill's Special with organic New York Strip is \$24); others start at \$6 for personal sizes and go up depending on toppings; salads and sandwiches \$4-9.

friendly practices: recycled glass countertops, reclaimed wood tables, art "canvases" made from recycled plastic bottles, energy-efficient appliances, soy-based concrete stain, bamboo pizza peels and recycled denim for insulation. Pizza Fusion even purchases wind credits to offset its carbon energy use and uses two hybrid cars for deliveries.

In addition, Borene wants to reach out to the community, locally and globally. He's done fundraisers for neighborhood schools and Heifer International. From Sunday to March 28 Pizza Fusion is participating in the Tap Project for World Water Week. As the project's Web

site (www.tapproject.org) notes, it was "born in New York City based on a simple concept: Restaurants would ask their patrons to donate \$1 or more for the tap water they usually enjoy for free, and all funds raised would support UNICEF's efforts to bring clean and accessible water to millions of children around the world."

While Pizza Fusion's motto is "Saving the Earth, One Pizza at a Time," Borene is quick to point out that "although we may cater to organic eaters, vegetarians, vegans and those with gluten allergies, even if you're none of the above, everybody's welcome ... and we'll serve you the best damn pizza you've ever had."



TRIBUNE PHOTO BY DAVID MIDDLECAMP

Pizza Fusion's pies come in a signature 18-by-9-inch oval shape and are available with organic, multigrain or gluten-free crusts. Shown here is the Greek pizza.