



# Clear Conscience:

Delivering green restaurants



Pizza Fusion Prius Hybrid delivery car

Traditionally retail and restaurant chains have lagged behind in the global efforts to go green but that tide is quickly turning and at the forefront is the fast-growing organic gourmet pizza chain Pizza Fusion.

The franchise offers organic gourmet pizza, sandwiches and salads created in LEED-certified buildings and delivered by hybrid vehicles.

"We're committed to serving the most delicious food possible, with the health of our customers and the planet at the top of our core values," says Vaughan Lazar, President and Co-Founder of Pizza Fusion. "We take a lot of pride in the food we serve; we also take pride in how it's served and how we build our stores."

With 17 stores open and roughly 32—and counting—on the way, Pizza Fusion's vision for the future is becoming a standard few competitors are ready to match.

#### ORGANIC GAP

"I've been eating organic for years and there was nowhere to for me to eat aside from Whole Foods and preparing my food at home," says Lazar.

"So we saw an obvious gap in that segment of the industry. And pizza is probably one of the most popular foods in America so we figured it was the easiest entry point—and it's a lot healthier than burgers."

Indeed the food caters to traditional pizza lovers and those who have been shut out of traditional restaurants. The chain offers a selection for those with specific diets and food allergies. They serve gluten-free pizza, brownies and beer. Vegans and vegetarians can enjoy pizza with soy mozzarella and vegan brownies. A multi-grain crust is offered for those seeking low-carb options. The menu in all stores is at least 75-percent organic.

Lazar has a background in marketing for the hospitality industry and while he had worked in various food service positions in college he was not a restaurateur. "Not knowing the restaurant industry was actually one of the biggest benefits when we started because we could approach this business with eyes wide shut, rather than thinking we can't use certain equipment or building materials," says Lazar. "We went against the grain and didn't listen to anyone's advice on how to run a restaurant."

#### PIONEERING LEED

Pizza Fusion's stores are helping to revolutionize the way small restaurants are built. They offset 100 percent of their power consumption with the purchase of renewable energy certificates.

One area in which Pizza Fusion is a pioneer is in the LEED certification of its franchise locations. They are the first and only national chain committed to building to LEED certification standards at each location. "We want to help drive that for the USGBC. LEED certification wasn't created for a 1,500-square-foot restaurant. It was designed to evaluate a 100,000-square-foot office building," says Lazar. "Our store in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, is officially the smallest project ever LEED certified and we want to continue working to pave the way for businesses like ours."

Green initiatives in store include mandating recycling and giving customers a discount for bringing back their pizza boxes for recycling. Other recycling efforts include using 100-percent post-consumer toilet paper and paper towels and making in-store graphics banner material from recycled plastic bottles. Additionally, heat from the ovens is recycled to heat water. Insulation is made from recycled blue jeans.

Furniture is made from reclaimed wood—such as old church pews used for booth seating—and other construction materials are recycled such as discarded slate roof shingles that are reused as wall tiles. Ceiling grids are made from recycled aluminum cans and post-industrial metals.

Eco-friendly cleaning materials are used in all stores. Take-out food containers and utensils are designed to decompose in a landfill within 60 days. Employees are provided with organic cotton uniforms.

All of these unusual steps are in addition to typical green building standards such as buying Energy Star appliances, installing energy-efficient HVAC systems, opting to use compact fluorescent bulbs and applying VOC-free sealants.

"It's humbling to be coined as leaders in the sustainability movement in the restaurant industry," says Lazar.

#### UPHILL CLIMB

Despite the company's early success, there have been challenges, with financing franchisees in a tight-fisted loan market near the top. "Fortunately,



Organic Pizza



Organic Sandwiches

we're not your average franchise so we're a lot more attractive to investors—we're on the cutting edge of a greater movement," says Lazar. "I don't think organics has even seen the light of day in terms of its full potential—and I think we're at a very early part of a big growth curve despite the economy."

Pizza Fusion has also experienced some growing pains related to the stresses afflicting the greater organic foods market. "Being a national distributor for organics for a small chain like ours is difficult but we've been very fortunate to find the right partners—and some distributors have used us to piggyback and offer organic and natural foods to their other clients," says Lazar.

With hopes of opening nearly 500 restaurants in the next five years Pizza Fusion has an uphill climb but one that seems to be part of a greater surge in sustainability.

"It's important to have integrity in what you do and we operate our business in this way because this is how we live our personal lives," says Lazar. "We want to continue to be at the forefront of the sustainability movement and to always be educating people that you can do business this way, and you can have a conscience and lead with your heart. You can take care of your employees and the planet and still have a profit at the end of the day." 🌱

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