

SUSTAINABILITY POSSIBILITIES

BY RUSTIC CANYON EXECUTIVE CHEF ANDY DOUBRAVA

AN INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

It's simple: Do your job. If you call yourself a chef, you need to accept and acknowledge the obligations that come with the title. This can't be just for show. You have a direct link to the agricultural industry (and if you don't, you're either not trying hard enough or you need to find yourself a new restaurant). And if you are, in fact, a restaurant chef, that's great. Fantastic. You also need to make money. You need to sustain your chosen lifestyle, you have people relying on you, and more likely than not, you're worried about your food cost. That's your job.

In my opinion, as a chef, you should want to cook vegetables that come from farms that care about the state of the environment, and these will be more expensive than the alternative. You should source from farms that raise animals that are allowed to live in fields of grasses and grains, and these will cost more than the caged commodity products. You get what you pay for: The best product doesn't always have the highest price tag, but often it will. So, why are you throwing it away? That's a pile of money, sitting in your dumpster out back. Not only that, but it's wasteful ... and even more so, if you're not composting what you can. Let the guilt of tossing away somebody else's hard work and dedication weigh heavily on your cheffy shoulders, but actively work towards lessening it.

What could you have done with those potato peels? You're running through lots of basil leaves and the stems end up in the can? Your bartender is juicing cucumbers, but where's all of that pulp going? You're watching profit and flavor compacting in the back of a garbage truck.

Salt is arguably the most useful tool in this fight for two big reasons. Salt draws out flavor, and in certain concentrations inhibits bacterial growth which allows

for preservation. Two percent is a good concentration to start with, with which the salt can be applied directly to your product or to the weight of water, which you could use as a brine — both of which will work for reasons that other reputable sources have already done a very good job of explaining. Get a box of kosher salt and a scale. This isn't rocket science.

Maybe you ordered too many tomatoes. Weigh, then blitz them with 2% salt, leave it at room temperature and see what it tastes like after a day or two — crazy tasty base for a sauce or broth. Mortar some herbs with 2% salt, leave them out for a few days then throw them in the dehydrator and grind it all up — crazy tasty powder for using in cures and rubs or for finishing dishes. Take those melon seeds that your cook just scooped out, mix them with 2% salt, leave it out for a few days then strain it — crazy tasty liquid to play around with. Those pepper seeds and trim left from the morning prep shift? Weigh a gallon of water and whisk in 2% salt. Submerge the pepper bits, leave it all out then taste the liquid after two weeks. Crazy. Tasty.

The possibilities are truly, massively, mind-bogglingly endless. You're coaxing flavor out of things that you may or may not have been conditioned to be okay with throwing away. Get weird, but maybe not too weird. In my experience, this kind of stuff works best to amplify the nuances of all of that incredible, responsibly sourced foodstuff that you spent money on. Funk is just an element in your Periodic Table of Flavor, and some dishes will benefit more than others from it. A touch of your salted tomato broth turns a mediocre sungold into something that makes your whole mouth tingle. Funk rounds it out. A cantaloupe seasoned with just a few drops of fermented cantaloupe juice (that you saved from those seeds) tastes even more like ...

a cantaloupe. It's effective and as subtle as you need it to be, and perhaps most effective when used subtly.

No matter how eager you are to showcase your preserves, the average diner will not be satiated with the world's largest plate of pickles. Just because you can do something doesn't mean that you should, but you never know until you try. The combination of "why not?" and "what if?" can get you into trouble, depending on your circumstances. Now if you're anything like me, the prospect of breaking the rules only serves as a reinforcing enticement. Obviously, with a touch of self-awareness right now, we are still talking about food.

What I'm saying, or trying to, is that creativity is needed in both the act of preservation and following through with the use of said preserve. I know you've got a lot on your plate. You might feel like you don't have any space in your head left for another obligation. But if you ask me (which you didn't, but you've made it this far), it's your job. So, do your job.

Keep a big container of 2% brine around. Experiment. Get your crew excited about it. Get your crew to get other kitchens excited about it. Stop using the word "scrap" and start using the word "trim." If you're going to work as hard as you do to make the food that you want to make, think about how hard somebody else has had to work to get those ingredients into your kitchen. They've done their job ... time to do yours.

If I'm agitating you, good. Oh, you're pissed off now? Awesome. Channel that anger and those insecurities and prevent those flavorful possibilities from ending up in a landfill. Get weird with it. Cutting down on food waste is a team sport, and you need to be the captain. So, lead the way.



KEEP