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Apr 21, 2007

Campaign aims to cut emissions

'Low-carbon diet' hopes to take bite out of greenhouse gases

By **Kristina Peterson / Daily News Staff Writer**

The latest diet to hit Palo Alto is all about reducing waste, not the waistline.

And instead of carbs, it targets carbon.

Beginning today - Earth Day - Bon Appetit is rolling out a "low-carbon diet" designed to cut the carbon dioxide belched into the air by the transportation of food to its 400 nationwide cafes, including three in home base Palo Alto.

One-third of the world's greenhouse gases come from the food system, said Helene S. York, director of the Bon Appetit Management Company Foundation. She said the company started designing the three-year program 18 months ago to reduce its own emissions while also demonstrating how individuals can make better food choices.

"If we're not paying attention to what we eat, thanks for driving the Prius, but get the Hummer out of your kitchen," York said Friday.

Bon Appetit chefs will have the next year to fully comply with the company's new policies, which include buying meat, poultry and produce as close to home as possible, serving only domestic bottled water, auditing kitchen appliances for energy efficiency and reducing the use of beef by 25 percent.

The livestock industry emits 18 percent of all greenhouse gases, according to a 2006 report by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. "This is a higher share than transport," the report notes.

"You can have more effect by cutting down meat consumption than you can by buying a Prius," said Laura Stec, a Palo Alto private chef and co-author of "The Global Warming Diet," a book due out in early 2008.

"The average meal travels between 1,600 to 2,500 miles to get to your dinner plate," Stec said.

Stec said the key to eco-friendly eating is buying seasonal, local food, which is fresher, more flavorful and healthier anyway.

Under Bon Appetit's new policies, chefs must be conscious of how far their food is traveling. York said the company already buys 30 percent of its ingredients from "food sheds" within 150 miles of each cafe.

By next April, Bon Appetit will also have a carbon "point system" in place so diners can calculate the environmental impact of each meal.

"We're a major buyer. We can make a difference by educating chefs to edit some of their choices," York said.

At Yahoo in Sunnyvale, executive chef Bob Hart now offers cage-free eggs from California and "strawberry salsa" made from Watsonville organic berries instead of serving processed cereal or bananas flown in from Ecuador.

"Instead of offering a juice that is produced in Brazil, it's better to have an orange grown in California," Hart said.

Or, in other words, orange you glad it's not a banana.

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