



Choices – Making Food and Beverage Decisions

By Nancy J. Wilson, CMP

As individuals, we make choices everyday...paper or plastic? Window or aisle? Debit or credit?

As conference organizers, we make choices too...Beef or chicken? China or disposable? Local or organic? Plated or buffet?

The choices we make about food and beverages are critical to the well-being of our guests, our budget and our planet. We have the responsibility for making these food choices for the large number individuals attending our meetings and events. These choices have become increasingly complicated as guests have come to expect food that fits their daily way of life whether that is low-carb, organic, or one of the many other options. Not only do we make choices about the food and beverages served, but also about how it is served.

Don't get overwhelmed! Here are a few ideas to start with to make those decisions easier.

- 1. Choose food in season.** From economic, health and environmental standpoints, choosing food in season in the local area has great benefits. Buying locally grown products helps support the local communities and offers fresher, seasonal and regional choices without the transportation impact. It is also a great way to celebrate the local flavor of the region. Local and organic is certainly the preference if available.
- 2. Choose seafood from sustainable fisheries.** Increased consumer demand for seafood is depleting fish stocks around the world and harming the health of the oceans. Today, nearly 70 percent of the world's fisheries are fully fished or over-fished. Simply choosing seafood from the guides below will take the guess work out of menu selection:
 - The Monterey Bay Aquarium publishes *Seafood Watch*, a guide for consumers. They provide a free pocket guide you can download and carry. Download it at www.montereybayaquarium.org.
 - Blue Ocean Institute also publishes a *Mini-Guide to Ocean Friendly Seafood* in a pocket guide format. It is available for free at <http://www.blueocean.org/seafood>.



3. **Choose food based on the history of your attendee's preferences and attrition.** Know your group's preferences and can order accordingly: Is a hearty salad is plenty, or would they prefer a full warm meal? In addition, guarantee meals based on their history. Are they early risers and all show up for breakfast or do they arrive just before the general session rushing in at the last minute grabbing a cup of coffee? Do they skip the conference lunch to have smaller business meetings at local restaurants? If you don't have this history, ask attendees to sign up for meals in advance in order to save both money and food.
4. **Choose china service.** Disposable cups, plates, and silverware not only add to the landfill, they don't have the same "first-class" service experience for your guests. The Environmental Defense Council reports, "Using 1,000 disposable plastic teaspoons consumes over 10 times more energy and natural resources than manufacturing one stainless steel teaspoon and washing it 1,000 times." Using cloth instead of paper napkins also adds to the experience.
5. **Choose not to serve individual water bottles.** Serving water from large pitchers or containers saves a tremendous amount of money (\$5-10 per guest per day depending upon the venue). You do the math. For one client that was \$25,000 in savings over the conference. It also saves all those plastic bottles from getting into the waste stream.

As grandma always said, "Choose wisely." Your guests, your checkbook, and the Earth will thank you!

Contact the friendly experts at MeetGreen® today to discuss how we can help you make your meeting green.