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THE WORKS BAKERY CAFÉ COMES CLEAN

This summer, Richard French, president of The Works Bakery Café, made a curious decision in these tough economic times. French—who built his company as much on his commitment to social responsibility as on his great tasting sandwiches, soups, and traditional New York-style bagels—decided to take his company clean. Clean chicken, ham, bacon, and turkey, that is. All of the meats The Works Bakery Café now uses in its sandwiches and salads are free of antibiotics, hormones, nitrites and nitrates.

For years The Works Bakery Café has been sourcing fresh, healthy ingredients for its menu items as close to home as possible: rBGH-free cream cheese and cheddar from Vermont family farms, cage-free eggs and organic Stonyfield yogurt from New Hampshire, smoked salmon and wild blueberries from Maine, and local, organic vegetables when available. When asked why now, French replied, “It didn’t happen overnight. I worked for over a year to find the right suppliers. People are becoming more aware of what is happening in the agri-business style production of our food. The FDA just approved genetically engineered salmon safe to eat and are considering whether to allow it to be sold without labeling it as GMO. Operating a business with a social conscience takes more effort; it’s more costly. I work hard to source local organic lettuce in season, for example. Last year the crop was wiped out in a heat wave. It’s tough. But I also have a family. When my son asks at dinner, “Daddy, was this a happy chicken?” I take his question seriously. I don’t think people realize that most chickens raised for food production live on what amounts to two-thirds the size of a piece of paper. Indoors. Under artificial lights. How can I feel good about serving it—to my family or my customers—if my answer is no?”

But French’s commitment to healthy and sustainable doesn’t stop there. Last year he worked with a local farmer to initiate a composting program for his store in Keene, New Hampshire, but not without a few hitches. Composting requires special bags, more frequent pick-up than recycling and trash, and—most importantly—educating staff and customers. “At the store we opened in Brattleboro, Vermont, this summer, we outgrew our original compost containers in the first month. I had to get special approval from the town for a larger container, which required us to place it across the parking lot because of space constraints, and arrange for more frequent pick-up. It’s more work for staff; it costs more money, but it’s the right thing to do.” Future plans include a solar-powered compactor for the Brattleboro store.

French opened his first store in Manchester, Vermont, in 1988. His business model has connected his passion for fresh, healthy foods with his commitment to social and environmental responsibility ever since. From the outset, French’s goal has been to create a food movement that would compete with fast food chains with their bottom-line focus, often at the expense of customers, employees, and the environment. The Works’ business plan was built on what is now known as the “triple bottom line”—the three pillars of people, planet, and profit—before the term was coined in the early ’90s by John Elkington.

Richard’s business model, revolutionary at the time, has been featured on [The Today Show](#) and [PBS](#) and written about in *Inc. Magazine* and *Green Business Quarterly*, well before concepts of sustainability were factored into business decisions.