

Greening the system

Earth Day comes around next week, but a give-and-take model of cost-effective, eco-conscious practices is at work every day in Chicago's restaurant world. By **Julia Kramer** Illustration by **Peter and Maria Hoey**



The **Green Chicago Restaurant Co-op** (buygreenchicago.org) negotiates prices with ecofriendly vendors to provide Green Seal–approved cleaners and compostable products to restaurants at prices that are competitive with conventional alternatives. The co-op's 200 members pay no dues and meet occasionally to share information on everything from sourcing 100 percent postconsumer toilet paper and green linens to meeting new standards for green restaurant certification to clearing the city's recycling and composting hurdles.

The co-op was founded in 2007 by

restaurateur **Dan Rosenthal**

who owns

The South Loop bar **Poag Mahone's** (poagmahone.com), which serves a heck of a lot of burgers and fries, leaving a fair amount of used oil.

The Loop lunch minichain **Sopraffina Marketcaffè** (sopraffina.com), one location of which produces about 300 pounds of food waste per day.

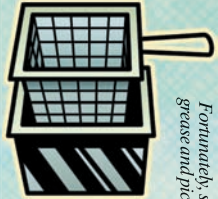
All that food waste gets picked up by

Ken Dunn, founder and director of South Side–based recycling nonprofit the Resource Center (resourcecenterchicago.org), who drives around in his truck picking up food waste from restaurants like **Frontera Grill** and **North Pond**. Dunn drops off the waste at a transfer station, and it's then moved to an Allied Waste composting facility in Indiana. With no commercial composting facilities licensed in Chicago, Dunn is restaurants' only option for recycling food waste on this scale.

But all of that could change

Seventh district state Sen. **Heather Steans's** bill to amend the EPA such that compost facilities are exempt from the regulations governing landfills passed the Illinois Senate in March and is now before the House as Bill No. 3873. If it passes, the bill would make commercial composting feasible within Chicago's city limits for the first time.

Fortunately, someone wants that grease and picks it up from the bar



Solvent Systems International (solvent-systems.com) collects used cooking oil from more than 500 Chicago-area restaurants. Whereas in the past restaurants had to pay to have their oil hauled away, Solvent Systems pays restaurants for the stuff. (The price per gallon fluctuates depending on commodity values.) The company filters the oil to rid it of particulates and neutralize any acids that built up in the cooking process, yielding a clean solvent called methyl ester—commonly known as biodiesel. Biodiesel powers all of Solvent Systems' collection trucks, and it's also marketed as Clean Green, a bio-based, odorless cleaning agent.

Solvent sells Clean Green to



Consolidated Printing (consolidatedprinting.net), the greenest printer in Chicago, which uses the recycled oil–based cleaner to wash parts of its presses. On those presses, Marilyn Jones (who established Consolidated in 1973) prints menus for restaurants and caterers using petroleum-free vegetable ink and sustainably harvested paper.

Consolidated prints menus for



Monogramme Events & Catering, which is run by Melissa Graham, who covers local farmers in her column "the Sustainable Cook," which she writes for the Chicago-based resource **the Local Beet** (thelocalbeet.com).

Gunthorp Farms' Greg Gunthorp, whose pasture-raised pork, chicken and duck are familiar sights at restaurants around town,

which passes off its fryer grease directly to power the vehicles driven by



such as Jerry Kleiner's flashy West Loop pan-Latin spot, **Carnivale** (carnivalechicago.com),

Other restaurants bypass the biofuel middleman entirely



One member of the GCRC's steering committee is

Cleetus Friedman, who owns **City Provisions** (cityprovisions.com), a catering company that holds monthly beer-pairing dinners at local farms, which guests travel to on a biodiesel-powered bus.

Pinkney doesn'tather used oil go to waste, sending it to

Janowski delivers eggs and pork weekly to

Friedman gives his food scraps to farmers like

Snyder delivers eggs, pork and seasonal produce like Concord grapes weekly to