

Wolfgang Puck benefits from HSUS partnership

BY JOSEPH C. ESSA

American consumers have spoken: The issue of animal welfare impacts how they spend their money.

A February 2010 survey by San Francisco-based marketing communications firm Context Marketing found that 69 percent of consumers said they would pay more for "ethically produced" foods, and that 91 percent of people include animal welfare in their criteria for considering food "ethical." This follows a November 2007 report by consulting firm Technomic Inc. showing that animal welfare is the third-most important social issue to American restaurant patrons, outranking the environment, fair trade, local sourcing, organic and other issues.

As an industry, we are smart to listen, and, indeed, we already have. Restaurant chains across the spectrum like Burger King, IHOP, Denny's, Red Robin, Carl's Jr. and others have joined with Wolfgang Puck Worldwide. The afore-

mentioned restaurants are now starting to use cage-free eggs and other more humanely raised products. The grocery sector is making changes as well. Just recently, Wal-Mart announced that all of its private-label eggs are cage-free, and Hellmann's announced that its light mayonnaise uses only cage-free eggs. If the largest retailers and food companies can do it, then it is a broadly applicable procurement policy within our industry.

We at Wolfgang Puck have long believed that sustainable farming and fishing, the humane treatment of farm animals, and reducing the amount of hormones, antibiotics, preservatives and pesticides in the food we eat lead to a better standard for all living creatures — humans and animals alike. In 2006, we looked at our businesses and realized we needed to make some changes. And we decided to contact the Humane Society of the United States, or HSUS. We knew they were the largest animal protection organization, and we felt

they would help us create programs that had the farthest reach and greatest impact.

HSUS gave us specific ideas for changes, such as switching to cage-free eggs, only using certified sustainable seafood, not using crated pork or veal, and offering more

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vegetarian options for customers who choose to eat less meat. After speaking with potential suppliers and performing an internal review of our operations, we decided to implement every recommendation. The issue was never about eliminating meat, but rather about offering consumers better choices and informing

them that, as a company, we are serious and genuine about the welfare of all.

Working with HSUS was a great experience. Our company found them to be extremely knowledgeable, open-minded and practical. At the same time, they were — and are — passionate about the welfare of all animals. They were not afraid to challenge us, and we thank them for it, because their expertise helped us become a better organization.

Not surprisingly, HSUS enjoys the 10th-highest brand image of any nonprofit and is the only non-human-services charity to make the Top 10, according to the Cone Non-Profit Power Brand 10 released last June.

I would recommend HSUS to any of my colleagues in the restaurant, foodservice and hospitality industries who similarly value animal welfare. ■

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