Environmental and Social Policy – Wahaca

Last Reviewed: 01.07.26

Mission Statement

From day one our co-founders Mark and Tommi have always tried to prove you can create a truly sustainable, multi-site restaurant business. From composting all our food waste from our first year to being the UK's first carbon neutral restaurant business in 2016 and one of the first restaurant groups in the UK to introduce carbon labelling. We will continue to strive to be the best we can in this area, always asking ourselves "How can we do this with an even lighter tread on the environment?".

We believe that we have a responsibility to the environment and its communities beyond legal and regulatory edicts. As a sustainable business, we are committed to reducing our environmental impact on the planet and continually improving our environmental performance as an integral part of our business strategy and operating model.

We aim to focus on three key areas that are relevant to our business:

Animal Welfare	Reducing Environmental impact	Caring for the natural world
Investing in Free range pork, Regen Beef and higher welfare chicken	**Carbon Neutral since 2016 and on our journey to Net Zero**	**Promoting biodiversity. Mexico is officially classified as 'mega bio-diverse' which has inspired us to try to work with a diverse set of ingredients across our menus.**
Choosing organic milk	**Reducing Plastics and packaging**	**Investing in supply chain projects & ingredients which have a long-term benefit to the natural world**
Choosing Free range Eggs	**Reducing impact through builds and operations**	**Working with organic and regenerative farmers where we can.**

To do this we look to work with people who share our values whether employees, suppliers or even our customers, we need to have you on board with our charter and excited about what we can do together.

Responsibility

Carolyn Lum, our sustainability lead, is responsible for ensuring that the environmental policy is updated and implemented. However, all employees, stakeholders and suppliers have a responsibility in their area to ensure that the aims and objectives of the policy are met.

Policy Aims

We aim to:

- Comply with and exceed all relevant regulatory requirements.
- Continually improve and monitor environmental performance.
- Continually improve and reduce environmental impacts.
- Incorporate environmental factors into business decisions.
- Increase employee awareness and training.

Sourcing

As founding members of the SRA, we believe in a holistic approach to the food system.
At Wahaca, what this means to us is supporting delicious, healthy and diverse plant-rich diets, prioritising sourcing from high animal welfare systems and reducing our reliance on animal based protein. This includes investing in sustainable farming systems, such as organic and regenerative, that support the resilience of our food system.
We have invested in regenerative and nature friendly farming systems, and are proud to be working with famers and suppliers such as Wildfarmed, Grassroots, Nino Blanco, Hodmedod's and Riverford Organic. As we believe that farming in a regenerative/ 'nature friendly' way, with lower inputs, and a focus on improving soil health, water quality and biodiversity, is the only way that our food system can withstand future shocks.

We define regenerative/nature friendly farming as following the principles of:

- Improving soil health
- Minimise/eliminate chemical inputs
- Supporting biodiversity
- Promoting carbon sequestration
- Improving water resilience
- Adaptive to farm context
- Positive animal welfare
- Collaborative with farmers
- Support farmer livelihoods
- Holistically positive for animals, people and planet

We recognise the need to encourage customers to transition to more sustainable diets, and move away from animal proteins. We will continue to innovate to show how delicious plant based dishes can be by:

- Innovating our plant based menu
- Reviewing our dishes to see if we can reduce the amount of animal based protein in dishes
- Continuing to use carbon labels to better show the impacts of animal based proteins
- Reduce our reliance on animal based proteins

Animal welfare has always been a key company value. We recognise that animals including fish and crustaceans are sentient beings, and have the capacity to experience pain, pleasure and emotions. We want to ensure we are working with farmers and producers who also recognise this.

We want to ensure that the seafood that we buy is caught in a manner that protects marine and freshwater ecosystems and that seafood does not come from unsustainable sources or overfished species. With this in mind, we choose to only source seafood that is certified.

Farmed seafood:

- Must be certified as responsibly sourced by ASC, Global Gap, or BAP 4*
- Must be rated 1-3 by the **Marine Conservation guide.**

Wild caught seafood

- Must come from **Marine Stewardship Council** (MSC) certified fishery or
- Must be rated 1-3 by the **Marine Conservation guide.**

We will only source our seafood from reputable suppliers who have rigorous modern slavery policies and checks.

Ethical Meat and Dairy

The standards we require for our meat supply are:

- Fresh pork must be British free range*
- We have committed to source 100% of our Beef from British farms practicing Regenerative farming principles. Cows are grazed for at least 250 days outside per year.
- Our milk is organic.
- Where possible our dairy is British (unless they are Protected Denomination of Origin products like Feta or Parmesan).
- 100% of eggs and third-party products containing egg (e.g. ice cream and mayonnaise) shall only use free-range eggs.
- We commit to using only soya (whether in animal food or not) that is sustainably certified, sustainable according to a recognised certification schemes such as the Responsible Soy (RTRS), ProTerra or equivalent by the end of 2025.
- We will introduce mechanisms to monitor the provenance and volume of soya sourced as animal feed in the supply chain by the end of 2027.
- We have made a commitment to source Better Chicken Commitment compliant chicken by 2027**, their six point chicken welfare policy is based on science based criteria, looking to increase the welfare standards for chickens across the world. By the end of 2026 we expect to have achieved 5 out of the 6 criteria outlined by the BCC.

  *This currently excludes Chorizo which is sourced directly from Spain by Brindisa.

  **We have extended our deadline due to supply issues, we are in communication with open cages/anima and compassion in world farming.

Responsible use of Antibiotics:

- We require supplies to comply with EU law banning the routine use of antibiotics as a preventative measure or as a growth promotor.
- Antibiotics deemed critically important to human medicine must not be used for animal husbandry practices

Direct sourcing

- We will only use fair trade or direct trade tea and coffee (otherwise must be approved to be equivalent by the SRA).
- We choose to source fair trade sugar.
- Where possible, we choose to source our produce from within the UK.
- We do not buy palm oil as a raw ingredient. We consciously monitor palm oil in our supply chain, and aim to keep purchases at a minimum; any palm oil products we do carry require a RSPO certification to ensure it is sustainably sourced.

- We source our avocados from reputable sources, currently Westfalia, the producers supplying avocados hold GlobalGap certification, key environmental impacts such as water usage are monitored at farm level and through the supply chain.

Menu Development

- We will continue to innovate delicious and vibrant vegetarian dishes and commit to keeping the menu at least 50% vegetarian.
- We will look at alternatives to meat, and continue to follow the principle of less, but better quality meat.
- Our focus is on delicious vegetarian dishes from whole foods, not processed meat substitutes.
- We offer vegan alternatives to dairy.
- We have calculated the carbon count of our whole menu and we are looking at how we can keep reducing its environmental impact.

Carbon Neutral and our roadmap to Net Zero

Since 2016 we have achieved CarbonNeutral® company certification in accordance with The CarbonNeutral Protocol working in conjunction with Climate Impact Partners.

We commit to reducing our carbon outputs on average by 4.2% per annum, in line with science-based targets .

We continually monitor our carbon footprint and are always looking for ways this can be reduced. However, as a company we prioritise supporting progressive soil regeneration projects and food producers using these methods over carbon offsetting (see below).

Biodiversity and the environment

We strongly believe that food without the use of herbicides, pesticides and fungicides will have an important long-term impact on the environment, improving water ways and drought and flood management; improving soil quality and its ability to process carbon, absorb water and grow food; and reversing the decline in biodiversity and wildlife. Where possible we will invest in food producers with a like-minded approach to nature restoration.

Waste

- We will only use ‘zero to landfill’ waste collectors.
- All waste will be segregated into general waste; glass; cardboard; food and mixed recycling to maximise our recycling efficiency. Our target is to recycle 80% of our waste which we will monitor monthly.
- All used cooking oil is recycled, and we invested in oil filtration systems with the aim of monitoring our restaurants’ oil usage and reducing it by 30%, using 2022 as a baseline.
- We will monitor and reduce the amount of **food waste** produced. We offer diners compostable ‘doggy boxes’ to help reduce waste and as a business we focus on smaller plates and portion sizes so we believe that our food waste is already relatively small but we continue to ensure that this is at the forefront of our development of new dishes, always considering the edibility of every ingredient.
- We engage with our suppliers about packaging to try and reduce the amount of packaging used.
- In 2021 we transitioned to resurfacing chopping boards to reduce plastic waste.

- We train our teams on plastic reduction within the business.
- We request that suppliers use materials that are biodegradable (non-plastic based) or recyclable.
- We will minimise the use of paper in our operations.

Energy, water and natural resources

- From April 2021 all energy contracts within our control will be sourced from 100% renewable electricity.
- We have set targets to reduce our electricity consumption by at least 5% YOY, and track usage on a weekly basis through energy monitoring.
- Since 2011 all restaurants use LED lighting and sensors to reduce the use of resources.
- Lights and electrical equipment will be switched off when not in use.
- Heating will be adjusted with energy consumption in mind.
- The energy consumption and efficiency of new products will be considered when purchasing.
- We use water efficient dishwashers.
- We have an eco-water purification system and offer free filtered water to all diners; our bottled water comes from a charitable water company.
- We use recycled paper and Forest Stewardship Council certified printers for menus, printer paper, blue roll and toilet paper.
- As of April 2022, 96% of our take-away packaging is home compostable (predominantly bagasse) or recyclable; we aim to retain this level as our minimum standard.
- From 2023 we have installed energy monitoring in all sites, which gives us daily insights, reducing overnight usage.
- The GMs and area ops are responsible for achieving the energy usage in their sites, and tasked with achieving YOY reductions.

Transportation

- We have reduced the need to travel with technology such as SharePoint, e-mails and video/phone conferencing.
- We consolidate produce through a third-party distributor to reduce individual journeys.

Maintenance and Cleaning

- When we are building a new site, we have a “SKA Retail” environmental assessment, SKA helps us identify where we can reuse materials, specify materials with high recycled content, install energy efficient equipment, use low voc paints and ensure that all timber is certified as sustainable. Our newly built restaurants have been rated with a Gold SKA rating.
- For every new restaurant, we aspire to achieve SKA Gold.
- The core cleaning products we source will be environmentally friendly – meaning that they use non toxic and biodegradable cleaning agents that will break down naturally and not pollute water sources. We work with Biohygiene whose products use biotechnology, which utilises microbes, enzymes, and natural plant derivatives to clean.
- We will only use contractors who are F gas compliant for refrigeration maintenance.

- Materials used in new restaurant fit outs and refurbishments will be compliant with SKA gold criteria.

Monitoring and Improvement

- We will comply with and exceed all relevant regulatory requirements.
- We will continually improve and monitor environmental performance.
- We will incorporate environmental factors into business decisions.
- We will increase employee awareness through team member training and reinforcing the messages contained in the Green Charter.
- We will review this policy and any related business issues at our quarterly management meetings.

People

We are committed to creating a workplace where our teams feel supported, valued and able to thrive. Our approach is structured around key wellbeing pillars:

Financial Wellbeing

- We ensure that all team members are paid at least the National Living Wage (currently £12.71) or above, plus tronc, irrespective of age.
- We operate a tronc system, managed by an independent Tronc Master, ensuring that all tips and service charges are distributed fairly.
- We support financial wellbeing by providing access to Stream and delivering financial education workshops.

Physical Wellbeing

- We provide each team member with a free meal per shift and coffee/tea, ensuring our teams are nourished and energised, in line with the same quality and care we deliver to our guests.
- We provide access to a wellbeing app offering resources to support physical health and overall wellbeing.

Mental Wellbeing

- We invest in training managers in mental health awareness, equipping them to support their teams confidently.
- We provide access to a 24/7 Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), including up to six counselling sessions where needed.

Social Wellbeing & Culture

- We foster a strong sense of community through regular social events and team activities.
- We use our internal communication platform to keep teams connected, share updates and celebrate achievements.
- We conduct quarterly team surveys to gauge engagement and wellbeing, with feedback reviewed by the Board and actioned accordingly.

Development & Engagement

- We are committed to developing our teams and, wherever possible, prioritise internal promotion for roles.

- We provide our team members with the tools, knowledge and support to take pride in the provenance and quality of our products. Through our training platforms, we educate and assess teams, particularly during menu changes.
- We provide sustainability training to inspire awareness and encourage positive behavioral change.

Responsible & Ethical Practices

- We have a zero-tolerance approach to modern slavery and only work with suppliers who meet our ethical employment standards.
- We maintain a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination or harassment and ensure teams are trained to recognise and report concerns safely.

Charities and Community

- We support Ednica in Mexico City, helping street-connected children through education, nutrition and care.
- In the UK, we partner with Chefs in Schools to improve the quality of school meals and inspire future generations.

Policy Review

We will review and update this policy at least annually, in consultation with team members and relevant stakeholders where appropriate.
For more information on our initiatives, please refer to our latest Impact Report.