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66%

reduction in food-serving carbon footprint after switching to single-use, natural plates and cutlery

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BUSINESS

Beach cafe chain invests in cutting its carbon footprint

AN ethically responsible hospitality business has reduced its carbon footprint from serving food by 66%, after swapping plates and cutlery for bio-based, single-use alternatives.

The Venus Company, which has cafes on four beaches in South Devon, looked at the environmental advantages of using sustainable palm plates and commissioned Cranfield University, a post-graduate public research university, to conduct a study into the benefits of environmentally friendly palm plates, wood cutlery and home compostable packaging, compared to ceramic and china crockery and metal cutlery.

Palm plates are made from the areca palm, indigenous to India. Its leaves are collected, cleaned and flattened into environmentally friendly dinnerware, which, once used, is disposed of along with food waste, or by composting.

Venus Company managing director Michael Smith said: “Our mission is to be the greenest cafe and shop operator.

“We’ve found resistance from some customers struggling to understand the benefits of using palm plates and paper cups which are more environmentally friendly, than reusing china cups and plates which go to landfill when broken.

“We want to educate people that eating with us contributes towards lower CO2 and helps safeguard our lovely Devon coastline.

“There are minimal carbon emissions involved as the palm plates and wooden cutlery are single use.

“Shifting to eco-friendly products is our priority to protect the planet for future generations.



» Venus Company founders Louisa Newman, Michael Smith and Lee Porter

Guy Harrop

“It’s essential for the hospitality and food industry to develop natural and renewable home compostable materials, for example, corn, wood, fibre and leaves.

“Our home compostable palm plates and hot drinks cups and lids are made of components and materials that should fully decompose in the soil in weeks, leaving nothing but nutrient rich compost,” Mr Smith said.

Dr Adrian Williams, of Cranfield University, said: “Venus reduced its recurrent carbon footprint from serving food by 66% through swapping conventional serving utensils for bio-based, single-use plates and cutlery.

“The biggest benefit was eliminating the necessarily energy intense washing up, therefore reducing electricity and water consumption.

“The results show that making and

using palm plates and wooden cutlery have lower global warming potential and water impact than reusable ceramic plates and steel cutlery, which incur very high manufacturing impacts.

“The overall impact of changing to palm plates and wooden cutlery potentially saves Venus causing the emissions of 3.2 tons of CO2 equivalents per site,” Dr Williams added.

New producers’ collective, born out of necessity, fills home delivery void

by **ATHWENNA IRONS**

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A NEW collective of South West farmers, fishermen and artisan food suppliers has been formed following the sudden collapse of the online food delivery service Farmdrop in December.

Farms to Doors is a new online food service delivering South West produce straight to the doors of homes across the UK.

When popular ethical online grocer Farmdrop went into administration, not only leaving hundreds of customers without Christmas food orders, it also impacted on more than 450 different producers across the country.

Four former South West suppliers to Farmdrop – Purton House Organics, Ruffle Organic Chicken, Sladesdown Farm and Sole of Discretion – have now

founded Farms to Doors to continue giving customers a service to buy directly from the suppliers’ co-op.

Caroline Bennett is founder of Sole of Discretion, an ethical fishmonger and collective of small-scale fishers.

She said: “I loved working with Farmdrop. The customers were curious and tried lots of different varieties of local fish. We offer complete traceability back to the boat and fishermen, so we were supplying customers that were ethically conscious and cared about supporting the local economy.

“I just loved the adventure and spirit that Farmdrop customers had. This was a massive part of our sales, so when they ceased trading, it was a huge blow.

“We got the news at 10pm at night, two weeks before Christmas. The next day I picked up the phone to Dan Mason from Sladesdown Farm and we discussed setting up our own service.

Within under 24 hours we had started working with one another and agreed we wanted to collaborate.”

Mr Mason runs Sladesdown Farm in South Devon, rearing poultry that is grown and finished on all natural feed. The collapse of Farmdrop hit his business hard, he said.

“We had to keep going, we had products in front of us which needed to be dealt with. We had a lot of support from local businesses and customers, so the initial shock wasn’t really there.

“But financially it’s starting to bite. There was always going to be a knock on effect when 30% to 50% of your business disappears from underneath you.

“We’ve always had complete control over the production side of our business. But with Farmdrop collapsing, we realised the very thing you need in a business – the sales – we didn’t have control of. It woke us all up.

“Setting up Farms to Doors has given us back some of this control, giving customers the opportunity to buy directly from us again. It’s brilliant that we now have the new Farms to Doors website up and running and we’re ready to go.”

Increasingly as people become aware of the global nature of our food supply chains, collectives such as Farms to Doors disrupt the model.

Ms Bennett says. “Put simply, customers that buy locally have a greater positive impact on the local economy and the environment.

“The collective has been such a revelation for me because I’m so used to working independently, but it’s been so much fun working together and learning from each other. There is a huge level of trust between us and the legacy of Farmdrop has empowered us to move it forward.”