

FARM TO FORK

Hoteliers are upping the ante as far as using local, seasonal, and traditional ingredients in their cooking in the aim to keep this sustainable and sensible.

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO



➔ The farm-to-table/ fork concept is more than just a trend, but a movement towards a more sustainable and healthier food system in India.

From sourcing through local farmers, to having their own kitchen gardens, hoteliers are walking the talk as far as interpreting and implementing the concept of farm to fork. And tables are looking happier and healthier too.

NEW VISTAS

The conscious traveller today is looking for ways by which they can reduce their carbon footprint during their travels. Several recent reports have indicated that the majority of the travellers are choosing sustainable retreats for their getaways and a big part of this is food. This again includes an entire gamut of terms from organic to sustainable to traceability.

In 1994, when organic farming was still a myth, a panchayat in Alappuzha went ahead and advocated the practice to its villagers, in the hope of making them self-reliant. By 2019, Kanjikuzhi, located on the shore of the Arabian Sea near Mararikulam, became a vegetable-sufficient panchayat where every household grows its own vegetables.

Inspired by the Kanjikuzhi model, Marari Beach, CGH Earth practices organic farming integrating the garden to create a lifestyle with minimum impact on the natural ecosystem. "The soil here is



➔ Radhakrishna Sheno, General Manager, Operations, CGH Earth

loose and sandy due to the proximity to the sea; it is very humid and hot in summer and rains heavily during the monsoon which makes it difficult to grow vegetables all year round. Yet endemic vegetable cultivation is made possible. To overcome the lack of nutrients in the soil, we use materials that are available in our own backyard like dried leaves, bird droppings, vermicompost, biogas slurry and farmyard manure which is locally called jeevamrutham (nectar of life). By adding the biomass regularly, the organic carbon content in the soil is improved gradually and this boosts plant growth. We allow the plants to self-seed and they are intercropped for diversity and natural pest control. We also share the harvests with animals and birds. We grow more than 30 varieties of vegetables, mostly



➔ The idea behind farm to fork/ table is to understand the place's agricultural specialties and connect with farmers who are harvesting the same in a sustainable and organic method.



➔ Retreats are going all out to make sure that they implement farm to table in a big way



➔ Karan Bakshi, General Manager, WH Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa



➔ Asif Fazlani, Managing Director, Fazlani Nature's Nest



➔ Jaidev Dutta, General Manager, Holiday Inn Bengaluru Racecourse

native vegetables and some Western varieties like cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, and carrots, thus keeping us engaged and excited about growing our own food," says Radhakrishna Sheno, General Manager, Operations, CGH Earth.

VEGGIE WONDERS

Having small kitchen gardens to large vegetable farms, retreats are now going all out to make sure that they implement farm to table in a big way.

Karan Bakshi, General Manager, WelcomHeritage Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa, says, "Our purpose was to engage the guest in picking the seasonal produce and see it on his plate during his meal. We have been successful in producing the local variety of vegetables and those vegetables that are not locally grown. For the last two years, we have a fully operating farm producing vegetables and fruits all year long. Also, employing local talent has been part of our core values right from the beginning. The farmers on the farm are from the local community who bring with them the knowledge of the soil, weather, and expertise on how to grow them organically."

At Fazlani Nature's Nest, the farm-to-table concept is taken to the next level by allowing guests to witness the journey of their food from the garden straight to the plate.

"We also offer our guests the unique opportunity to pluck fruits and vegetables themselves and watch their meal being cooked right in front of them. At Fazlani, we are committed to promoting sustainable practices, supporting local agriculture, and minimizing food waste. We believe that by prioritizing fresh, organic, and locally sourced ingredients, we can not only create healthy and delicious cuisine but also contribute to a more sustainable food system," says Asif Fazlani, Managing Director, Fazlani Nature's Nest.



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PLANT POWER

At Holiday Inn Bengaluru Racecourse, the modern Indian speciality restaurant, Glass Kitchen & Bar

is based on sustainable dining with a focus on farm-to-fork. The concept of the restaurant is to make the best of locally grown ingredients and be transparent about what they serve. All the dishes served in the restaurant come on the table, directly from near-by and local farms, without going through a store, market, or distributor along the way.

“With our eco-conscious philosophy, we treat our guests with superfoods and dishes like plant-based Galouti Kebab. Keeping in mind climate change and the rising population, we source our food responsibly. For instance, we only buy fish that are not scarce, prawns that are cultivated and not the ones from the sea. We encourage hydroponics. We source microgreens from different farms. Rich in vitamins and minerals, microgreens are grown organically and are a nice way to add colour and flavour,” explains Jaidev Dutta, General Manager, Holiday Inn Bengaluru Racecourse. “Likewise, at the 50-mile Diet Restaurant at Spice Village, ingredients are sourced within 50 miles of the resort to reduce our carbon footprint,” he adds.

FARMER-FRIENDLY

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➔ Hoteliers can encourage farmers to grow the ingredients in the hotel premises, by providing space and raw materials on a barter system.



➔ Mahesh Kini, Executive Chef, JW Marriott Bengaluru



➔ Simran Singh Thapar, Executive Chef, The Leela Palace Bengaluru



➔ Ashok Rathore, Area Director – Jaipur and Ajmer and General Manager, Rambagh Palace, Jaipur

vesting the same in a sustainable and organic method. At Grand Mercure Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall, the mixologist uses Devanahalli pomelo to create fresh cocktails.

“Our signature coffee blend is sourced from one of the oldest organic estates in Chikmagalur where the farmers roast the beans themselves in small batches. Another step towards the Farm to Table concept is adopting and promoting terrace farming through ‘The Backyard Project’. Our little patch of green on the terrace gives us a small organic supply of many vegetables including cauliflowers, eggplants, tomatoes, and chillies. We also grow our own microgreens and herbs. To promote the idea of growing your vegetables, we also give away seed bombs and mini grow kits to our guests with a permanent educational display at the lobby,” says Sachin Maheshwary, General Manager, Grand Mercure Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall.

Chefs today love to experiment and hence work closely with growers to plan seasonal menus much in advance. “The modern farmers are young entrepreneurs who are very keen to understand consumption patterns and develop specialty crops. At JW Marriott, Bengaluru, we work with several select farmers to produce and procure ingredients like the heirloom tomatoes, vine tomatoes, a wide variety of exotic mushrooms, exotic leafy vegetables, and the like,” says Mahesh Kini, Executive Chef, JW Marriott Bengaluru.

SUSTAINABILITY CUES

The farm-to-table/ fork concept is more than just a trend, but a movement towards a more sustainable and healthier food system in India. Today, conscious hotels can choose to work with their vendors and food partners to grow what they want and how they want rather than picking or sorting from the heap of produce, which is certainly more empowering. Simran Singh Thapar, Executive Chef, The Leela Palace Bengaluru, says, “We, at The Leela Group, believe in sustainable sourcing and even work on sustainable concepts like local



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sourcing and zero waste, where we have curated special menus showcasing our initiatives on this global concern. One must be aware that not everything grows everywhere and while the concept is about freshness and best produce, the emphasis must be on creatively using what is available. Some of the ingredients are modified to grow all year round and may not be the best as it is not natural. Seasonality and availability of an ingredient growing in your surroundings with the climate and soil available sometimes becomes challenging when guests expect these to feature.”

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

With the growing interest in nuanced dining experiences, the farm-to-table/ fork concept has gained much popularity over the years with diners being more interested in knowing where their food comes from.

“Today, the concept is evolving and expanding to encompass new trends and ideas, such as urban farming (growing crops in the city/ terraces/ kitchen gardens, making fresh produce available to more people in urban areas); sustainable practices (regenerative agriculture, organic farming, hydroponic and aquaponic farming); plant-based alternatives with the growing rise in veganism and vegetarianism. As part of our organisation’s efforts under our sustainability programme Paathya, our environmental stewardship efforts are holistic in nature, with emphasis on promoting areas such as the use of clean energy, conserving water, managing waste, and avoiding single-use plastic,” says Ashok Rathore, Area Director – Jaipur and Ajmer and General Manager, Rambagh Palace, Jaipur.

LOCAL LOVE

With concepts like farm-to-fork, local and hyperlocal cuisines are also getting a much-needed fillip.

Nivedan Kukreti, Hotel Manager, Anand Kashi by the Ganges, Rishikesh – IHCL SeleQtions, says, “The hotel promotes sustainability by offering the guest local produce in their meals which in turn helps the local farmers. We source all the ingredients for local Gadhwal cuisine from the local farmers and encourage them to produce more. It does reduce the carbon footprint for the ho-



➔ Vedagiri Rajaram, Director Food & Beverage - Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center



➔ Rana Dominic Gomes, Area Chef South Royal Orchid Hotels



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tel by using fresh grown vegetables, and overall, it is a healthier option due to the nature of ingredients that are found in the hills of Uttarakhand.”

Vedagiri Rajaram, Director Food & Beverage - Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center, adds, “We serve fresh catch of seafood from local vendors. Our restaurants curate creative seasonal menus keeping in mind the local produce availability in the region. The muddled fruits, mint and lime summer drinks are also sourced from local markets instead of sugar syrups or artificial sweeteners. Cucumbers, zucchini and avocados filled exotic healthy salads are also plucked from the local farms. Our beverage manager also dishes out some lip-smacking cocktails using locally grown herbs and edible flowers.” Marriott uses MESH - Marriott Environmental Sustainability Hub as an internal environmental reporting platform that tracks the food waste to support their long-term sustainability and social impact goals and they hope to attain 50% reduction of food waste by 2025.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Fresh farm-to-table/ fork concept is not cheap, rather it’s expensive since its supplies are limited. But we can encourage farmers to grow the ingredients in the hotel premises, by providing space and raw materials on a barter system.

“Farm-to-table/ fork has high demand, yet the supply is less and expensive. Climate and infrastructure are the other major challenges of the concept. Lack of awareness about the concept and its demand is also a concern,” says Rana Dominic Gomes, Area Chef South Royal Orchid Hotels.

One of the main challenges of the farm-to-table/ fork concept is ensuring a consistent supply of high-quality ingredients throughout the year. Nevertheless, the farm-to-table/ fork concept is a more sustainable, healthy, and community-oriented way of eating that is gaining momentum in India. 