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Sustainability continues to rank high on the list of what consumers expect most from restaurants, according to the [National Restaurant Association](#) as a top trend for 2013. From locally-sourced food to recyclable and compostable products, many quick-service restaurants (QSRs) are looking for innovative strategies to build their sustainability story.

To help owners and operators reduce waste, water and energy use this Earth Day, April 22, [Cintas Corporation](#) has identified five commonly overlooked areas where restaurants can improve their commitment to sustainability.

“As an industry that’s been criticized for waste and excess, many restaurants want to limit their environmental footprint,” said Ann Nickolas, Senior Director of Foodservice, Cintas. “However, sustainability goes far beyond serving food from a rooftop garden or local farmer – it requires a collective effort between the front and back of the house.”

The top five most overlooked areas for sustainability improvements include:

1. **Restrooms.** Let’s face it – restroom maintenance is often an afterthought for many QSRs. However, an ongoing restroom maintenance program that keeps surfaces clean from build-up extends the life of fixtures and dispensing units and can prevent landfill waste. In addition, metered air fresheners, soap and towel dispensers limit the amount of product guests use, which reduces waste.
2. **Floor care.** To reduce water and energy use, implement programs to protect and maintain floors. According to the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI), mats that extend six to 15 feet inside an entryway will trap 80 percent of soil and moisture before it is tracked into the building. In addition, an effective matting program that protects

entryways and transitional areas will limit the transfer of internal contaminants,

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Although paper and wipe-off white cleaning wipes may be a quick way to keep hard surfaces clean throughout a restaurant, they aren't the most sustainable option and can contribute to excess landfill waste. Consider alternatives to disposables such as microfiber wipes, which can be laundered and re-used many times, extending the product lifecycle and diverting products from the waste stream. Microfiber wipes also reduce up to 98 percent of bacteria from the surface, thereby improving food safety efforts.

5. Cleaning chemicals. Many foodservice operators purchase cleaning chemicals in ready-to-use form, which creates unnecessary packaging, transportation and waste. Using a package-free chemical top-off service ensures chemicals are always available, and reduces waste associated with storing chemicals or improperly diluting chemical concentrates. Using Green Seal or Design for the Environment (DfE) certified chemicals also limit the amount of caustic materials released into the environment.

“Too often, restaurants look at food sourcing when considering sustainable options and neglect to review the full operational picture,” added Nickolas. “From restrooms to stock areas, there are several additional strategies restaurants can implement to improve their environmental profile.”

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