

2019 UFI Awards: Best Sustainable Development Communication

Entry by: RAI Amsterdam

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Heartwarming Amsterdam: love food, no waste

Introduction

The kitchens at RAI Amsterdam process about 500 tonnes of food a year, applying two sustainable approaches in the process.

Firstly, we use many local products, where possible from companies who generate direct added social value to the region, such as care farms and organic farmers. Secondly, we do everything possible to prevent food waste. All unused food is repurposed as much as possible, with a recent example being a weekly lunch organised at the facilities of the Salvation Army.

Our communication about these initiatives is mainly implicit. We ensure that clients and visitors are made aware of the origins of our products and what happens to any that go unused. This is achieved in an optimistic way without forcing information on people, reflecting our belief that actions have more impact than words.



Background

RAI Amsterdam

Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) is an integral part of RAI Amsterdam's strategy. It has even been embedded within our mission: the RAI aims to stimulate the sustainable development of people, markets and society. In doing so, we maintain a focus on our ecological and social environment, constantly striving to increase the sustainability of our operational processes and work with local suppliers where possible. We help organisers create sustainable and responsible events. Eco-friendly advances are stimulated at our own exhibitions, contributing to the further innovation and sustainability of various sectors.

Basement Chefs

The kitchen team of RAI Amsterdam consists of 26 individuals who are known as the Basement Chefs, after the area of the RAI in which the kitchens are located. These chefs are a visible part of the organisation and always open to smart new initiatives. They love good products and hate waste. The Basement Chefs gained national fame in the Netherlands in 2016 after purchasing a large batch (1000 kg) of tomatoes from local farm Kwekerij Osdorp which would otherwise have gone to waste after a large restaurant chain went bankrupt. They used the tomatoes to make their own culinary ketchup, which is still a popular product today.

Scope and objectives of Heartwarming Amsterdam

The Basement Chefs at RAI Amsterdam aim to work with the best products while maintaining a focus on the welfare of people, animals and the environment and without creating unnecessary waste. In addition, RAI Amsterdam establishes connections with its surroundings and uses its influence to support social and sustainable initiatives in the region. These two ingredients were at the heart of the Heartwarming Amsterdam concept, which has the following two goals:

1. Local procurement with a focus on people and the environment
2. Preventing food waste

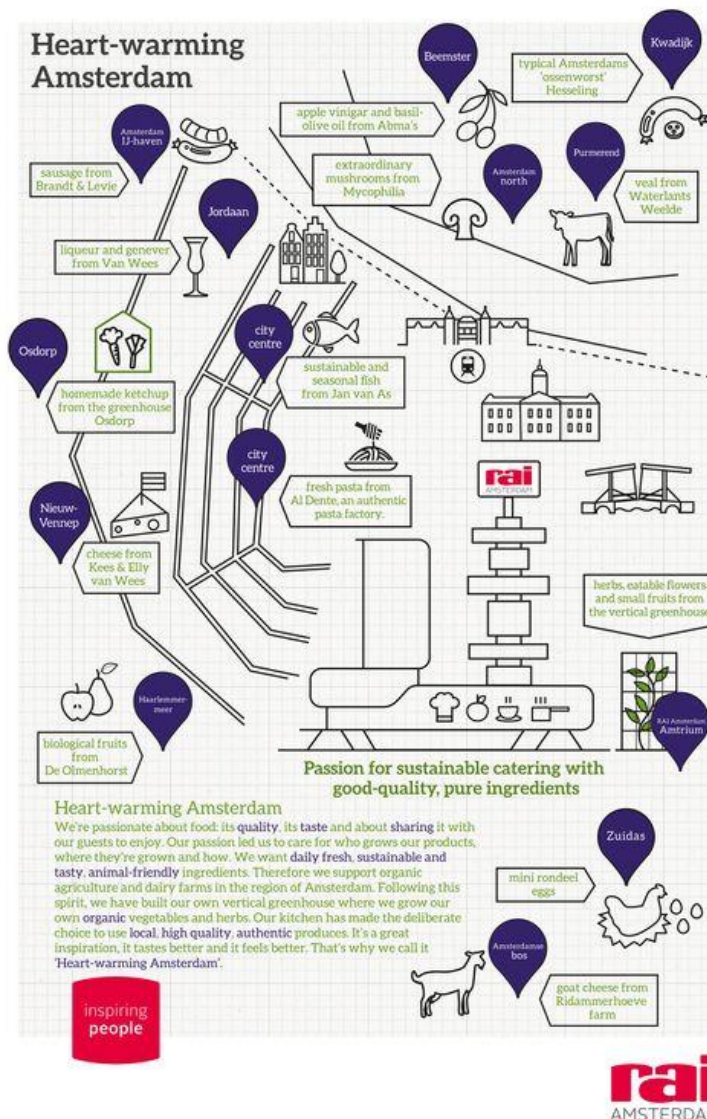
Details and description

1. Local procurement with a focus on people and the environment

Where possible, we work with products and manufacturers from the Amsterdam region. In addition to quality, we also focus on the added social value these products and organisations can offer the region. To illustrate, we buy veal from the Landzijde foundation, which provides meaningful employment for the disabled, people suffering from addiction and young unemployed. Another preferred supplier is the Ridammer Hoeve goat farm, which educates Amsterdam school children. We only use free-range eggs from Het Rondeel, where chickens are kept with a major focus on animal welfare and the environment. Moreover, we try to use North Sea fish where possible and are associated with the Vis&Seizoen foundation, which stimulates the use of seasonal fish.

Please watch this clip for an impression of our local suppliers:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaKgs4YB_Ro



2. Preventing food waste

Preventing food waste in the event industry is difficult; less people than expected may turn up, organisers might order too much food, and there's always a safety margin to prevent shortages. Within Heartwarming Amsterdam we have found various ways of preventing the wastage of food products.

- Preventing food waste starts at the source: we avoid working with vulnerable and fast deteriorating ingredients.
- If organisers are open to the idea we will adjust the catering range to prevent waste. In this framework we created a street food menu at events such as Money2020 in June 2018 (13,500 visitors), where everything was prepared on site so that unused foods could be repurposed.
- We developed a sustainable food box that allows people to take away unused items.
- We work with Instock, an organisation that buys leftover products from Albert Heijn (the largest supermarket chain in the Netherlands) which we then repurpose.
- Products from event catering are repurposed in our company restaurant, where a daily chef's special is served for lunch and dinner.
- Unused products are donated to the Food Bank whenever possible.

- A unique recent initiative is the weekly three-course lunch organised for the Salvation Army in Amsterdam North.

New: weekly lunch for the Salvation Army in Amsterdam North

While prepared meals cannot be used by the Food Bank, we don't want to see them go to waste. Looking for a new purpose we came into contact with the Salvation Army's 'Bij Bosshardt' in Amsterdam North.

'Bij Bosshardt' (named after the Dutch Salvation Army's frontwoman Majoor Bosshardt) is a meeting place in the neighbourhood that is open to everyone, and to people suffering hardship in particular. We now organise a free three-course lunch for some 50 people here every Thursday. Normally, the lunch served would cost € 4.50. By offering a free lunch, the facility attracts new people, often those who need it most. And in addition to providing free food, it also allows people to make new social contacts.



Implementation plan

We believe in action, which is why we continue to expand our activities in the framework of Heartwarming Amsterdam. The Salvation Army lunch is the most recent example, starting as a pilot in 2018 and becoming a weekly activity in 2019. The project entailed overcoming various challenges.

- Lots of creativity was required from the chefs to make a tasty and well-balanced lunch with the unused food products.
- We had to find a way to transport the food to 'De Bosshardt'. We now use a van from the technical services department of RAI Amsterdam driven by a volunteer from a local volunteer organisation.
- We started with a pilot of several months after which we evaluated and decided to continue the project.

Measured results

Heartwarming Amsterdam results

Of the 500 tonnes of food processed a year, 115 tonnes of food is procured from local producers. This means: 23% of food is procured from local producers.

RAI Amsterdam won 'the Gold level of the EPCAS Food Waste Initiative' in July 2018 for its various activities aimed at preventing food waste.

Results of the weekly lunch at 'De Bosshardt'

- Some 1,500 kilos of food prepared at the RAI is repurposed rather than being thrown out.
- Both visitors and volunteers come into contact with new products and dishes.
- 50 people save €4.50 on lunch a week, equalling total annual savings of €11,700 for these visitors.
- Now the most impoverished people can also enjoy lunch at 'De Bosshardt' on Thursdays and enjoy a break from their social isolation.
- The Salvation Army comes into contact with and helps a new group of vulnerable people.
- The project generates energy and enthusiasm among all involved. RAI Amsterdam welcomes the chance to actively contribute to the welfare of people in the city in this way.

Conclusion

Heartwarming Amsterdam is a sustainable concept with room for further expansion. Moreover, it has an increasingly positive impact on the welfare of people, animals and the environment. Words lead to actions which lead to enthusiasm and more ideas and initiatives.

While being proud of what we have achieved to date, no-one is resting on their laurels. We will continue to keep looking for new ways to use food even more sustainably.