



Two chefs at Inn by the Sea in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, pick lettuce, herbs and scallions from the on-site garden. Derrick Daley, head gardener, grows a variety of lettuces, rhubarb, pumpkins, corn, squash, eggplant, edible marigold and nasturtiums.

Who Will Define Green?

STATE VS. NATIONAL LODGING CERTIFICATION

By Rauni Kew

The concept of sustainable travel can be traced back nearly three decades, but the hospitality industry began to feel a tangible impact just two years ago when a growing number of guests began requesting Green accommodations.

Consequently, hotels across the country responded with an array of voluntary Green initiatives. And, so too did government agencies and local hospitality associations. To date, there are at least 10 states with certification programs that address reductions in energy, chemicals, water and solid waste.

But, as has happened in other industries with nascent regulatory and advocacy groups, there is a subtle battle brewing over jurisdiction. Who is better positioned to determine the parameters and metrics that define Green in the hospitality field, and how best to apply those standards, has yet to be sorted out. Regional and state certification proponents believe they are better able to address the issues that are unique to their communities, resulting in a greater environmental

impact. Advocates for national certification turn that argument on its head; they view the disparate Green definitions and guidelines as determined by each association, state and region as part of the problem.

Dan Ruben, executive director of Boston Green Tourism (www.bostongreentourism.org), which includes seven EPA Energy Star certified hotels, favors a uniform national program. "A standardized national program would help with this patchwork of regional certifications," says Ruben. "The large number of programs confuses consumers and hoteliers, makes it difficult to communicate a clear message about Green hotels, and detracts from hotels' ability to market their Green achievements. Another problem is that some state programs set the bar too low, in my opinion," he adds.

But Ruben believes that the current national programs do not meet the needs of state programs.

"Green Seal and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) are perceived to be expensive and



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process-intensive, thus suitable for large hotels only," says Ruben. "The EPA Energy Star program is more flexible, and has a lower limit of 20 to 50 rooms, depending on the category. Still, Energy Star does not certify very small hotels and certain other kinds of lodging properties; and they speak to energy efficiency only," he concludes.

Ruben would like to see a national certification that serves all categories of hotels and allows state's to strengthen certain provisions. "It would preclude the need for state certification programs," says Ruben. "Since such a program does not exist today, state programs are necessary."

The patchwork of regional programs falls directly in line with the original goal of sustainable travel set in the 1980s: to decrease the impact of travel and tourism on local environments while conserving the local culture and ecosystems. Sustainable tourism celebrates eating local foods, hiring local people, and protecting the environment while maintaining an area's authenticity—all reasons why people travel. Regional certifications are perfectly suited to that original grass roots concept, and they serve to protect the interests of the hospitality industry.

New England has over 160 Green lodgings that have been certified by four state programs in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Rhode Island. The benefits of these programs are numerous, according to Michelle Veasey, director of New Hampshire's Sustainable Lodging and Restaurant Program (www.nhslp.org). "Regional programs offer far more than a



Twenty-two bird houses and indigenous plantings at Inn by the Sea help preserve the local eco system and earn points toward certification by the state's Green lodging program.

certification process, and are typically more service oriented," says Veasey. "Our quarterly seminars are geared to issues important to hospitality here in New Hampshire. Affordable, realistic solutions often come about through local networking. Sharing best practices saves time and avoids problems," she concludes.



The Inn by the Sea celebrated its use of biofuel as an energy source with guests carving locally-grown pumpkins. The renewable, locally-grown vegetables (pumpkins) were symbolic of the renewable vegetable oil (soy) domestically-grown which is used as fuel at the Inn.

Having a one-size-fits-all concept doesn't sit well with Veasey. She believes issues, such as water conservation, should be handled very differently in states as disparate as Arizona and New Hampshire. "National programs are sometimes so complex or expensive they exclude participation," adds Veasey. Representatives from Energy Star (www.energystar.gov), the national program that focuses only on energy efficiency and works well for standard hotels and large chains, made a presentation to NHSLRP last year that was not applicable to the majority of their membership, according to Veasey. The NHSLRP is comprised of small properties that cannot handle the complicated certification process, or the costly, mandatory engineering oversight. In addition, the application was expressly limited to properties with over 40 rooms. The Energy Star Web site currently states that resorts, and extended stay properties are also "non-eligible categories," which categorically excludes an even greater number of New England's vacation hotels, inns and B&Bs.

In contrast, an NHSLRP seminar last fall illustrated how state jurisdiction programs can cater to specific property needs. At the event a chef discussed creating menus using only New Hampshire grown food, and a lighting expert walked members through a Portsmouth establishment and pointed out energy saving solutions. Veasey was also on hand to direct members to state agencies offering educational or financial help with local environmental issues.

In fact, energy may not even be the primary consideration for many New England properties. At Saybrook Point Inn & Spa in Connecticut, innkeeper Steve Tagliatella worked with state agencies on programs to develop clean water. The inn includes a marina, and that makes clean water a vital component of their sustainability efforts. Green initiatives that are more focused on a region's specific needs are much more likely to generate participation.

In contrast to "exclusionary" programs, initiatives can be

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crafted to remain open to new techniques and solutions, which is critical to the quickly evolving Green movement. Maine's Green Lodging Program, administered by Peter Cooke at the Department of Environmental Protection, is set up to embrace any innovation that is effective in protecting the state's environment. "If you really want to protect the environment you have to encourage participation in a way that is meaningful, so change can happen," advises Cooke. "Once introduced to Green practices, hotels get hooked and continue to add initiatives well beyond the mandatory 100 points," he adds.

When hotels devise regional innovations that work, Cooke

adds them to Maine's workbook. Many Maine properties have been at the forefront of Green technologies and practices. For example, Inn by the Sea in Cape Elizabeth received points for creating a wildlife habitat. The carbon neutral inn also heats with bio-fuel; is adding dual flush toilets, solar pool panels, recycled flooring; and is working with a LEEDS consultant on a spa addition. The Haraseeket Inn in Freeport composts all the property's waste, and creates menus solely based on Maine's farming products. The Maple Hill Farm B&B Inn & Conference Center in Augusta generates energy with a wind turbine.

"Tourism is the economic driver for the state," says Greg Dugal, president of the Maine Innkeepers Association. "In

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Maine there is a strong connection between tourism, nature and a clean environment. It makes economic sense for innkeepers to protect the pristine lakes and beaches that attract travelers," he adds. "The DEP program is successful because it responds well to what is important to tourism and the economy in Maine."

The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and the Vermont Small Business Development Center started the first Green hotel certification in New England 10 years ago. Peter Crawford, VtSBDC Environmental Assistance Program director for 65 Green hotels in Vermont (www.vtgreen-hotels.org), believes state programs are

capable of substantial benefits at a very low cost. "State programs are usually free and tend to have easily understood, transparent standards—eliminating barriers to participation," says Crawford. "We go on site and help with ideas that would be prohibitive for a national program." He also appreciates support from local trade organizations. "State programs cater to very specific needs, and change can happen more easily at the local level," concludes Crawford.

Rhode Island's new program, which is organized by the Hospitality & Tourism Association and the Department of Environmental Management, is modeled after Maine's program. Thomas E. Armstrong, principal environmental planner in the department, sees benefits in the ability to clearly communicate state requirements. "Every state has such different requirements, even down to solid waste," says Armstrong.

State programs have been successful in getting hotels to participate voluntarily in conservation in an unregulated industry. They have documented huge reductions across the board in energy, water, chemical and solid waste, while protecting their regions' environments and unique characteristics. By sustaining their local environments, state programs help preserve the unique qualities of their region and cultivate a more attractive destination for travelers.

A national site with links to state programs and a single indicia recognizing all state certifications could be helpful in alleviating consumers' confusion. However, the addition of another national program with complex applications and expensive oversight will ultimately hamper participation and slow the Greening of hospitality. ■

Rauni Kew is a consultant on innovative eco programs. She works with Inn by the Sea, Cape Elizabeth, Maine, which was selected as a Top Ten Green Hotels worldwide by TripAdvisor. Kew also works with the Maine Innkeepers Association, and is on the advisory board of Ecorooms.com. She can be reached at: kewr@glance.net or (207) 602-8500.

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