Climate Change Threatens Independent Restaurant Industry; Urgent Action Needed

Climate change poses an immediate threat to the independent restaurant industry and the millions of people that it employs. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, floods, drought, fire, and shifts in agricultural patterns are driving up costs for an already vulnerable industry and undermining the ability of chefs to meet consumers’ expectations for high-quality affordable meals at all price points. IBISWorld predicts that independent restaurants’ revenue will drastically decrease due to rising climate-related costs. How restaurants feel that impact will depend on the effectiveness of our collective efforts to reduce climate change. In addition, a new report from the Global Food Institute at George Washington University and James Beard Foundation found that rising temperatures, extreme weather events, floods, drought, fire, and shifts in agricultural patterns have all contributed to the rise of inflation in recent years.

As a chef, I witness daily the detrimental impact of climate change on my business and my employees. It drives up ingredient costs, causes erratic price swings and harms the producers who supply us. The restaurant industry already operates on slim margins, and cost increases have an outsized impact that threatens our ability to stay open. We urgently need our elected leaders to take bold action to combat climate change. Our plates, our livelihoods, and our planet depend on it.

— Ricky Moore
Chef-Owner, Saltbox Seafood Joint, Durham, NC;
James Beard Award Winner for Best Chef: Southeast
Independent restaurants are powerful economic engines, creating millions of jobs across the country and supporting the growth and viability of related local businesses, including farms.

According to a new report from George Washington University's Global Food Institute and the James Beard Foundation, the independent restaurant industry is the 5th largest employer in the U.S., employing 3 percent of the U.S. workforce—totaling 3.9 million workers, generating $75 billion in wages in local economies across the U.S. and over $209 billion in revenue.

Climate change and its impacts present the most immediate threat to the food supply chain of independent restaurants, and the decreased availability and quality of commodity and specialty crops represent a longer-term challenge.

+ **Restaurant Closures, Layoffs, and Rising Consumer Costs:** Due to the impact of climate change, independent restaurant owners and chefs face rising and wildly fluctuating costs driven by low crop supply, ingredient shortages, and significant operational challenges due to extreme weather disruptions. As climate change grows worse, it will lead to restaurant closures, employee layoffs and rising costs for consumers.

+ **Threat to Farmers:** As climate change disrupts traditional weather patterns, farmers continue to face unpredictable yields, increased vulnerability due to pests and diseases, altered growing seasons, intensified extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, and severe health risks. As these threats persist and the number of farms continues to shrink, it will continue to put pressure on the supply chain that is vital to the success of independent restaurants.

To support the independent restaurant industry in the face of climate change, federal policymakers can consider the following actions:

+ **Support conservation programs** to help farmers implement practices that can mitigate climate change, increase yields and source sustainable ingredients for restaurants.

+ **Provide climate-smart technical support and capacity building** to address the volatile aspects of farming and implement ecological strategies to make land more resilient.

+ **Support local and sustainable farming practices** that diversify our supply chain, and provide opportunities for small, midsize, and disenfranchised farmers to thrive.

+ **Advocate for sustainable food policies and practices** such as crop diversification, regenerative farming, efficient water and energy use, and reduced farm waste.

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**Why This is Important:**

The Independent Restaurant Industry Is An Economic Force

Impact of Climate Change on Independent Restaurants and Supply Chain

What Federal Policymakers Can Do to Help:

To get involved, visit jamesbeard.org/climate-solutions-for-restaurant-survival.

Email impactforward@jamesbeard.org with any questions.