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Sustainability in the kitchen: a glossary

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Biological farming: It started in Europe in the 1990s, is being developed in Australia and is finding its way to America. Biological farming is chemical-free and focuses on understanding soil, its components and its life in order to focus on the causes and not the symptoms of weeds, disease or insect problems. More on the various methods of [sustainable farming](#).



Hervé Houdré

Composting: All food products that enter a kitchen can be composted if not consumed: meat, bones, dairy and fish, vegetables, grains. Paper products can be, too. They are all stored in special bins that food composting companies collect regularly and transport to farms or composting facilities. There they are mixed with wood and leaf waste, yard waste or manure, then ground up and mixed together in the desired ratio. Microbial life digests the material and breaks it down, creating "compost, » an organic soil amendment whose application falls somewhere between that of a mulch and a fertilizer. It has strong nutrient characteristics and great water retention qualities and is an invaluable way to replenish the soil. Most composting facilities sell their compost to landscapers and developers, through some

retail channels, for use in green roofs or for bioremediation, an application where the micro-organisms in compost are used to digest, and therefore mitigate, pollutants in a soil.

In most areas of the U.S., except maybe in the Southwest where waste disposal fees are the lowest, the price per ton to compost is less than the price per ton to dispose of waste at a landfill.

Eco-friendly, nature-friendly, environment-friendly: a good or service that minimizes its impact on the environment at each phase of its life cycle.

Ecoganic: Due to the painful paperwork and cost of being certified "organic," some farmers have decided to no longer apply for such certification but still operate their farm according to the same federal guidelines. They came up with the term Ecoganic as they are not entitled to use the term Organic any longer.

Endangered species: A population of animals or organisms that may disappear due to pollution. It is important to be aware that a lot of fish species are on the list and caution should be taken before serving them—including, surprisingly, swordfish and tuna. It is, however, recommended to look at several endangered fish lists; the Dover sole, for instance, is not mentioned on the U.S. lists but is definitely a fish at risk.

Good Web sites about endangered fish species include the [Monterey Bay aquarium](#) and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#). The [Greenpeace UK site](#) is quite alarming.

Fair trade: Originally, this term referred to a partnership between non-profit companies and retailers in the northern hemisphere and producers in underdeveloped countries who were fighting low market prices and their dependence on intermediaries who were taking advantage of them. There are two types of producers: the small farmers, usually organized in cooperatives, and the workers of plantations or factories whose employers guarantee decent salary, the right to join a union and generally good housing. There are more rules that must be agreed upon by the producers: health and safety, environment protection and no child labor.

The minimum standards to be certified Fair trade are there as a reference but the producers must show serious willingness to go far beyond in order to keep the status as improvements must be continually obtained in social responsibility, transparency and environmental protection.

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Trading standards stipulate that producers have to:

- pay a price to producers that covers the costs of sustainable production and living,
- pay a premium that producers can invest in development,
- partially pay in advance, when producers ask for it,
- sign contracts that allow for long-term planning and sustainable production practices.

Local: To observe the Triple Bottom Line of Profit, People and Planet it is highly recommended buying as many local products as possible. They usually will cost less and will help support local businesses and transportation will be kept at a minimum. Moreover, customers are more interested to discover and taste local products rather than what they can find in their supermarket. Serving seasonal products is very important too as it reduces imports and transportation.

Natural product: Constituted of substances present in or produced by nature, rather than artificial; product not artificially colored or treated. Beware of some "natural products" so qualified by their producers simply because they contain "some" natural substances but not all.

Organic food: the best definition is on [Wikipedia](#): Organic foods are made according to certain production standards, meaning they are grown without the use of conventional pesticide and artificial fertilizers, free from contamination by human or industrial waste, and processed without ionizing radiation or food additives. If livestock are involved, they must be reared without routine use of antibiotics and/or use of growth hormones and generally fed a healthy diet. In most countries, organic produce may not be genetically modified.

Recycling: Almost everything can be recycled. Clean paper and cardboard, metal, aluminium, glass, plastic, computers for "e-cycling", compact fluorescent bulbs. Even bulk disposal items like desks, chairs, mattresses can be recycled in some way. Many charitable organization are looking for old equipment that will still be useful to people or countries in need. Particular attention should be given to batteries which can be recycled but should be collected separately. By law they should not be sent to landfills but back to the vendors or to collection companies. If you get some money for equipment that was already amortized you may offer it to a charity ; you will have taken care of two of the three P's, People and Planet!

Sustainable product: Those products providing environmental, social and economic benefits while protecting public health, welfare, and environment over their full commercial cycle, from the extraction of raw materials to final disposition.

This is the second installment of a two-part series on sustainability terms to know. The first is "[Coming to terms with sustainability](#)."

Hervé Houdré began his tenure as general manager of the Willard InterContinental Washington D.C. in 2004. He is recognized for introducing refinements which impact profit and increase market share. Under his leadership, the Willard InterContinental has embarked on a sustainability program, Willard InterContinental - The Next 100 Years. Houdré, who has written a white paper, Sustainable Hospitality© : Sustainable Development in the Hotel Industry, and his team, have put into place a five-year roadmap that defines and quantifies the mid-term SD goals for the hotel. The hotel published its first GRI Standard Sustainability Report available at www.willarddc.com/sd.

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