



Emerging Chain Elevation Burger's Higher Purpose

Elevation Burger expands with an eco-friendly approach to burgers and fries.

By Maya Norris, Managing Editor -- Chain Leader, 12/1/2008

[Elevation Burger](#) plans to make an environmental and competitive impact with its eco-friendly concept. The Arlington, Va.-based company says its commitment to being a carbon-neutral company that serves healthful, organic fare should set Elevation Burger apart in the crowded premium-burger segment as it embarks on franchised expansion next year.

Founder and CEO Hans Hess, a former real-estate consultant, launched Elevation Burger in 2005 in Falls Church, Va., after spending three years developing the fast-casual concept. The made-to-order burgers on the limited menu feature organic, [grass-fed, free-range beef](#). French fries are cooked in [olive oil](#), which is then converted into [bio-diesel](#). And cookies are made with organic eggs and butter.



Elevation Burger will encourage franchisees to purchase Clean Energy Offset Credits to reduce their stores' environmental footprint.

Restaurant construction follows suit using renewable materials. The modern yet cozy decor features bamboo flooring, [low- or no-VOC paints](#) that emit little or no toxic fumes, recycled bead board and acoustic ceiling tiles, compact fluorescent bulbs and energy-efficient equipment. Although the company store does not meet the [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design](#) guidelines of the U.S. Green Building Council, Hess says the franchisees that have signed on so far have volunteered to build their stores to earn LEED certification. "Most people who are attracted to the Elevation Burger concept understand that part of what we do is our environmental focus," Hess says.

Serving the Customer

While franchisees are aware of the effects of Elevation Burger's green principles, the company is not so sure customers fully understand how the concept's eco-friendly practices benefit them. So Elevation Burger will launch new in-store signage in December that touts the benefits of organic food and renewable resources. For example, a sign will explain that grass-fed beef contains higher levels of omega 3 fatty acids than conventional grain-fed beef.



The menu features burgers made of fresh, organic, grass-fed beef and french fries cooked in olive oil.

minutes during peak shifts.

Elevation Burger wants to not only educate customers but also enhance their experience in the store. This year it created a new position: The Guest Guru delivers food to the customers and attends to their needs such as refilling drinks and clearing tables.

Elevation Burger is also testing a new cooking method for the burgers. Hess won't elaborate on how he plans to shorten the cooking time, but he says it will lower ticket times to five minutes; ticket times are currently six to seven minutes during slow periods and 12

Growing Green

In the meantime, Elevation Burger is looking forward to expansion. Franchisees will open nine restaurants in 2009 and at least six more in 2010 in Washington, D.C., Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Texas.

It costs about [REDACTED] to open a unit, which ranges from 1,500 to 2,000 square feet. The company plans to open in endcaps in strip centers, power centers and lifestyle centers in a mix of residential and business areas. Elevation Burger targets college-educated customers, women and families with young children.

“People who spend a buck more on a hamburger meal and have the understanding or education where they understand what the product is, they get the value proposition,” Hess says. “Those customers flock to us.”

Elevation Burger expects to have 100 units open in five years.



Snapshot

Concept Elevation Burger

Headquarters Arlington, Va.

Units 1

2009 Systemwide Sales ██████████

Average Unit Volume ██████████

Average Check ██████

Expansion Plans 9 in 2009, at least 6 in 2010