



>> Epicurean Group strives to deliver high-quality food at reasonable prices by sourcing seasonal goods and supporting local communities.

Celebrating Food

Epicurean Group serves healthy food through honest sourcing. **By Janice Hoppe**

When Epicurean Group opened its doors more than a decade ago as a foodservice management company, it broke new ground for the industry by using local farms and ranches as suppliers and focusing on sustainable practices. The company continues to embrace the same core values it was founded on, which are exactly what today's health and environmentally conscious consumers are demanding.

"I absolutely love fresh and local food," CEO and founder Mary Clark Bartlett says. "I was born and raised in Brooklyn and my father's family had been farmers since the early 1900s. I grew up around great food; we had our own gardens and went to the farmers' markets in New York. I'm glad to see consumers are embracing the kinds of foods I grew up with."

Clark Bartlett's passion for fresh, locally grown food led her to create Epicurean Group in 2003, and today she

operates a large contract foodservice business with her values serving as the foundation of the company. She's finding that the company's competitors are trying to copy its practices.

Pioneering Healthy Practices

Potential customers were at first skeptical that Epicurean Group could compete with big companies by using menus of seasonal, healthy, locally sourced food. "We were pioneers. We went into school and college campuses and took soda machines out and put in spa waters. We

company profile

Epicurean Group
www.epicurean-group.com
Headquarters: Los Altos, Calif.
Employees: 450+
Specialty: Foodservice management
Mary Clark Bartlett, CEO and founder: "There is a demand for good food and we are answering it."

used real potatoes and roasted them with the skins on,” Clark Bartlett says. “It’s only recently that Michelle Obama started talking about making healthy choices, and movies and books came out about how unhealthy the sugar, salt and fat in processed, supersized food is for us. We proved that we could deliver healthy food at the same price as huge global companies that serve industrial food.”

How do they do it? Clark Bartlett says there are three ways:

- **Serving Seasonally**

Food costs are low when supplies are high. And that happens when farms and gardens are at their peak.

- **Buying Locally**

Sourcing locally eliminates the transportation costs of shipping

processed foods from warehouses and factories.

- **Supporting Community**

Many competitors require their chefs to buy their food from a subsidiary company, often at higher prices. Epicurean Group buys food directly from producers in the local community at fair prices – for the grower and the company.

As an industry leader, Epicurean Group remains dedicated to environmentally and socially responsible management practices. The company is passionate about healthy, fresh food and delivering an incomparable dining experience, whether it’s a corporate café or a university dining hall. “It’s exciting and not always easy,” Clark Bartlett says. “If it was

easy everyone would be doing it and they’re not. We have fun with it and our chefs are very passionate about it. We really put our hearts into what we do.”

To keep the culinary team up-to-date on the latest trends and education, Clark Bartlett hosts an annual companywide meeting where she also highlights Epicurean Group’s accomplishments, goals, values and how they align with its clients. She invites world-renowned chefs and thought leaders to speak. “The teaching aspect is so important,” she adds. “It’s critical that people in our company understand our values and why we are doing this. We want people to be aware of all the issues around food.”

Epicurean Group wants to help feed the world better food, and its more than 450 employees work passionate-

Ryan, like all our Epicurean Group chefs, is proud to serve the freshest ingredients and finest artisan products in our restaurants and cafes.

Like the Barsotti/Barnes family, second-generation farmers at Capay Organic, we’re committed to local farms and seasonal, sustainable food.

Epicurean Group is ... **fresh. honest. local.**



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Epicurean Group + Capay Organic
Serving You Delicious, Healthy Food



>> Epicurean Group says its "fresh, honest, local" philosophy will help it change one environment at a time. Cooking by Mother Nature's schedule and preparing food in season means it tastes better and is more nutritional.

ly for the cause because they have the freedom to be creative. "I think that in the culinary world, when they have the freedom to do that – to create – that's what makes it satisfying," Clark Bartlett says. "Our chefs are proud of what they do, their food looks phenomenal and they have a unique camaraderie because they are all very passionate about healthy, delicious food. Each of our cafés operates independently. The chef and manager collaborate with their client to create seasonal menu items that their customers are hungry for."

Building Culinary Leaders

Getting into the kitchen, collaborating, learning from each other and cooking together has built strong camaraderie among Epicurean Group's chefs. "There is quite a bit of collaboration each summer, as our chefs get ready for back to school," Clark Bartlett notes. "They team up, help each other, text pictures over the weekend and all work together. They're excited about what they are doing."

Epicurean Group hosts a number of professional development sessions throughout the year for its chefs. "Bang

the Pot" is a quarterly group training where chefs come together to share ideas and learn new techniques. The company also started a new training program, "Building Culinary Leaders," to expand its chefs' and sous chefs' skills in accounting, purchasing, management and public speaking and "round out the whole person." "This is exciting for us because the more they understand, the more successful they will be," Clark Bartlett says.

Fresh, Honest, and Local

Epicurean Group's fresh, honest, local philosophy will help it change one environment at a time and educate the community, Clark Bartlett believes. "Americans are so used to eating every fruit and vegetable all year long that we've forgotten what's seasonal," she says. "When you cook according to Mother Nature's schedule and prepare food in season, it tastes better and is more nutritional."

To cook and serve what's in season, Epicurean Group visits local farms to talk about their products before choosing them as a supplier. "We are lucky to be in the 'food mecca.' The best food

and wine in the country can be found right here in California," Clark Bartlett says. "It's so important to support our local farmers, and to eat like our grandparents and great-grandparents ate."

In the fall, Epicurean Group will launch a new program, in conjunction with Fair Trade Campaigns, to promote Fair Trade products and values. The company will continue to stay true to its value of supporting local farms and artisan producers, even as it expands into new markets beyond its northern California home.

One of its newest clients is in the middle of Oklahoma. "We work with local suppliers who know our specs and understand our values to source and deliver to the Oklahoma location," Clark Bartlett adds. And, she believes, as organic, local and seasonal products become more mainstream, demand will grow and products will become more affordable. "There is a demand for good food and we are answering it," she adds.

Understanding Food

The company will continue to focus on education and to share their knowledge. Epicurean Group's ultimate goal is to educate Americans about freshly prepared, seasonal food and help them understand what they are really eating when they eat processed food.

"They can spend more on food now or on healthcare later," Clark Bartlett notes. "When food is delicious, there's nothing more satisfying. We need to teach people how to eat – to enjoy the pleasures of seasonal local food and food traditions, to celebrate over food and to eat something that's good for you."

From skepticism to imitation, Epicurean Group's business has grown and prospered. "We're happy to have been leaders in sustainable foodservice and to have inspired so many followers," Clark Bartlett says. **FD**