



# Standard Withdrawal Proposal

## Restaurants and Food Services (GS-55)

October 25, 2021

**Overview.** The following standard is proposed for withdrawal. This proposal summarizes Green Seal's rationale for the withdrawal of this standard.

- Standard for Restaurants and Food Services (GS-55, Edition 1.0).

Every five years, Green Seal assesses each standard for accuracy and relevance to its respective market. In 2018 to 2020, Green Seal conducted an assessment and determined that the GS-55 Standard provided a strong set of best practices for healthier, greener restaurants, but identified a major barrier to certification: demonstrating compliance with the standard was not feasible for most restaurants due to the time and financial limitations. Therefore, Green Seal is proposing to withdraw this standard with the intention of converting this tool into a best practices guide to inform consumers and support leading restaurants.

**Green Seal is accepting comments on this proposal from October 25 to November 24.**

We encourage all stakeholders and members of the public to submit feedback including supportive comments, additional information, or objections.

### **Instructions for Comment Submission**

Please submit comments on this proposal to Green Seal via email to [standards@greenseal.org](mailto:standards@greenseal.org).

## Overview of Green Seal's Standard Withdrawal Process

Green Seal maintains standards in conformance with best practices in standard development via Periodic Maintenance, as defined by ANSI's Essential Requirements for Standard Development.

Under the Period Maintenance approach, Green Seal evaluates standards at least every five years for accuracy, relevance, and impact. If an evaluation confirms that the standard is accurate, relevant to the market, and has achieved a positive impact as intended, the standard remains active and available on Green Seal's website as the basis for certification of products or services.

If an evaluation determines that the standard is no longer accurate, no longer relevant, or no longer impactful, Green Seal may opt to revise and improve the standard or withdraw the standard. In the case of withdrawal, Green Seal's process is the following:

**Public Notification.** Green Seal publishes a proposal that provides context and rationale for withdrawing Green Seal standards.

**Public Comment Period.** Upon public notification, Green Seal announces an open Public Comment Period for stakeholders to submit supportive comments, neutral or informative comments, or objections. Public Comment Periods may remain open for either 15 or 30 days depending on the level of stakeholder activity within the last five years.

**Publish Stakeholder Comments.** Within 30 days of the close of a Public Comment Period, Green Seal publishes formally submitted stakeholder comments.

**Publish a Final Decision on Standard Withdrawal.** Green Seal posts notification on Green Seal's website that a standard will be withdrawn, or, if there is strong stakeholder opposition to the proposed withdrawal, may post notification of a Standard Revision initiative. The Final Decision includes Green Seal's responses to all formally submitted stakeholder comments.

**Withdraw Standard.** A withdrawn standard and its standard development documents remain on Green Seal's website within the Standards Documents Library for at least five years after the withdrawal date. Products and services cannot apply for certification to a withdrawn standard. Records of withdrawn standards can be beneficial for educational purposes for product designers and for higher education sustainability courses and research.

## Rationale of Proposed Withdrawal

Since 1989, Green Seal has established a reputation for market impact and expertise in formulated products, materials, and services associated with cleaning and facilities care. Our standards address the most significant and verifiable health and environmental impacts associated with consumable goods, e.g., those intended to be used and replaced within one year of purchase. Over the past three decades, Green Seal has also developed standards that are peripheral to this core scope of cleaning and facility care – in the case of this proposal: restaurants and food service operations. To maximize the positive impacts of our programs, Green Seal is strengthening our focus by sunsetting certain standards outside of this core scope.

From 2018 to 2020, Green Seal evaluated our program for restaurants and food services including conducting stakeholder outreach. In 2020, we determined that this standard was outside of our core scope of cleaning and facility care, and that the investments needed to implement the standard were not financially feasible for most restaurants, for which profit margins are low and estimated at 3-5 percent<sup>1</sup> compared to 5- 13 percent for a clothing store,<sup>2</sup> for example. Therefore, Green Seal is withdrawing our Standard for Restaurants and Food Services (GS-55). Green Seal will continue to encourage restaurants to purchase third-party certified products including hard surface general purpose cleaners, floor care products, hand soaps, and paper products, including bath tissue and napkins in order to protect the health of their workers and diners and reduce environmental impacts in those areas.

## Impacts of Restaurant Operations

The US food service industry had a revenue of \$800 billion in 2018.<sup>3</sup> Food service businesses are defined as any facility serving meals and snacks for consumption.<sup>4</sup> Sales in the U.S. restaurant industry have doubled since 2000, and reached an all-time high before the onset of the SARS CoV-2 pandemic in 2020.<sup>5</sup> According to Green Seal’s analysis conducted during the criteria development phase of the GS-55 Standard, 95 percent of the environmental footprint of food service operations fall within the food production phase of the service life cycle. The remaining five percent is attributed to the use of energy, water, or materials (paper and plastic products) at the food service facility.<sup>6</sup>

A summary breakdown of environmental impacts associated with food production is the following :

- Industrial agriculture accounts for 26 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and 70 percent of global freshwater withdrawals.<sup>7</sup>
- Sixty-five percent of emissions from agriculture is attributed to cattle (methane) and use of fertilizers and wastes in soil (nitrous oxide).<sup>8</sup>
- Large quantities of freshwater are needed for the irrigation systems that most US farms implement.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A Look Into Restaurant Profit Margins, <https://rmagazine.com/articles/a-look-into-restaurant-profit-margins.html>

<sup>2</sup> What Is the Profit Margin for Retail Clothes?, <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/profit-margin-retail-clothes-25123.html>

<sup>3</sup> Food Business News, <https://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/12972-state-of-the-industry-food-service>

<sup>4</sup> USDA Economic Research Service, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-markets-prices/food-service-industry/>

<sup>5</sup> Restaurant industry in the U.S. – statistics & facts, <https://www.statista.com/topics/1135/us-restaurants/>

<sup>6</sup> Baldwin, C., Wilberforce, N. & Kapur, A. Restaurant and food service life cycle assessment and development of a sustainability standard. *Int J Life Cycle Assess* 16, 40–49 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11367-010-0234-x>

<sup>7</sup> Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food>

<sup>8</sup> World Resources Institute, <https://www.wri.org/insights/everything-you-need-know-about-agricultural-emissions>

<sup>9</sup> FoodPrint, <https://foodprint.org/issues/how-industrial-agriculture-affects-our-water/>

- Food packaging associated with food production is often designed as paper-based single use and makes up over half of all municipal solid waste: In 2014, 63 percent of the 258 million tons of municipal solid waste generated in the US was single-use food packaging, and only 35 percent of this waste could be recycled or composted.<sup>10</sup>
- Energy used in food production is also considerable, accounting for 30 percent of total global energy consumption (with 90 percent of global power generation being water-intensive).<sup>11</sup> Growth in the US agriculture industry has increased by 110 percent in the past 50 years due to rapid global food demand, exacerbating these impacts from the US food system.<sup>12</sup>

### **Green Seal's Standard Development Rationale**

Green Seal pursued standard development in this space because of the strong demand for more sustainable food service options by consumers. In 2019, nearly 60 percent of millennials surveyed indicated they would choose a restaurant over another based on its ability to provide “sustainably grown, raised and manufactured foods.”<sup>13</sup> In 2018, large industries, such as retail, saw the highest sales growth at 14 percent from products derived from sustainable farming – highlighting a consumer preference for greener food options.<sup>14</sup>

### **History of GS-55 Development**

The GS-55 Standard for Restaurants and Food Services was issued in March of 2014 as part of a partnership with The Green Chicago Restaurant Coalition (GCRC) and The Rosenthal Group. The standard was originally a pilot program conducted with GCRC in Chicago restaurants. Participating facilities used criteria developed by the Green Restaurant Research Team at the University of Chicago, with impressive results: one participating restaurant diverted 96 percent of its waste, while another restaurant was able to limit waste to only a few gallons per year. The standard focused on key areas of composting, food donation, recycling of solid waste and grease and limiting disposable packaging. After the success of the pilot operation in Chicago, the standard was issued and opened to all applicants.

### **Summary of Standard**

- Food sourcing through use of foods produced in a sustainable manner
- waste management, including food waste, compostable waste, recycling and water quality management
- energy use
- water consumption
- the use of other environmentally preferable products and services.

### **Restaurants and Food Services Certified to GS-55**

At the date of this proposal, three organizations are certified covering nine restaurant locations.

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<sup>10</sup> FoodPrint, <https://foodprint.org/issues/the-environmental-impact-of-food-packaging/>

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Water, <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/water-food-and-energy/>

<sup>12</sup> National Center for Biotechnology Information, 'Environmental Effects of the U.S. Food System,' <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK305182/>

<sup>13</sup> The state of millennial dining, <https://restaurant.org/articles/news/the-state-of-millennial-dining>

<sup>14</sup> IFT, 'Sustainability: How Food Companies Are Turning Over a New Leaf,' <https://www.ift.org/news-and-publications/food-technology-magazine/issues/2018/august/features/sustainability-at-food-companies>

**Public Comment Period**

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