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William Dissen is an award-winning chef and owner of [The Market Place](#) in Asheville, North Carolina. He's also a champion of sustainability and eating local and was named Fortune Magazine's Green Chef of the Year two years in a row. We sat down to talk with him about his career, his commitment to sustainability, and how other chefs can get involved, too.

Before we get into where you are now, can you share how you got into the hospitality business?

I was born and raised in Charleston, West Virginia, and started by washing dishes and doing prep at age 15. I went to West Virginia University and continued to work in restaurants along the way. I earned dual degrees in French and English, but when friends and family asked what I wanted to do, it was cooking, so I went to culinary school at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. My career took me to various places. I spent time in Montecito working at a country club where I got to cook with Julia Child. While in Jackson Hole, I received news that there was an internship open at [Greenbrier](#) and I had been a Greenbrier scholarship recipient at cooking school. While there, I met Donald Barickman of [Magnolia](#), [Blossom](#), and [Cypress](#). I helped him with a cooking demo and was invited back to Charleston to work at [Cypress](#). I got burned out and went to the University of South Carolina to study international hospitality and restaurant management. After that, I started working on a business plan for my own restaurant.

How did you end up in Asheville?

I was blown away by Asheville on my first visit — it felt a little Southern, a little Appalachian, plus it had what felt like a combination of West Coast culture and a Soho-Manhattan vibe. It felt like home.

I bought [The Market Place](#) restaurant and have run it for the last eight years. It was a fine dining restaurant. We renovated it still focusing on supporting local farms, but we made it more for the everyman. I changed up the menu. It has more small plates now, and we have live music. We also put thermal solar panels on the roof, used recycled bamboo flooring, and installed a lightweight concrete bar. We wanted to be local and sustainable in every way.

As a chef in a landlocked city, when did seafood sustainability come into your consciousness?

It's always been important to me! When I lived in Charleston and Santa Barbara, I was near the water, and I've always loved to fish. How can you be all about local and sustainable and then serve bluefin tuna? Seafood sustainability is just part of what we do. We use local Sunburst trout, but, even when it's not local, it's always sustainable, carefully and lovingly grown, and harvested the correct way. I believe that happy cooks putting love and care into the food leads ultimately to happy customers.

How did you get involved with the Blue Ribbon Task Force for the Monterey Bay Aquarium?

I participated in [Cooking for Solutions](#) at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and we became a restaurant partner. The [Seafood Watch](#) selects chefs to join the task force that are really walking the walk. The chefs on the [Blue Ribbon Task Force](#) partner to advocate beyond their own restaurants — at events educating people about the importance of eating sustainable seafood. Just one of the things I do is go to Capitol Hill a few times a year advocating for federal fisheries management, making sustainable seafood part of the larger conversation.



Why is sustainability so important and which programs do you recommend?

You have to ask yourself, “Do you want to cook great food?” If so, then you have to use great ingredients. It starts by taking the time to hand-select it and to get to know who is raising and harvesting it. When you take that extra step, you’re putting more thought into your menus. You know how it’s raised and the flavor of it. It’s not just purchasing haphazardly off of a procurement guide.

[Seafood Watch](#) is the gold standard; they have scientists who work with [NOAA](#), and that’s where the buck stops for climate science. I use [FishChoice](#) to run seafood assessments. [Chef’s Collaborative](#) is a great resource for finding sustainable products, as well as the [James Beard Foundation Impact Program](#).

What’s your advice for chefs?

Take an active role in your community. Make sure you have a food policy council in your area. We live a fast-paced life, and it’s easier to just order from a big box company, but, at the end of the day, the food tastes better when you take the time to know the people and stories behind your food.

What’s next for you?

I’m getting ready to open [Haymaker](#) in uptown Charlotte, North Carolina, which we hope will launch late fall of this year. It will be similar to The Market Place— new American cuisine — local, sustainable. My grandfather was a coal

miner, and he used to joke that he was a haymaker. For some the name means a knock out punch and for others a drink, but a haymaker is also a party, so it works on lots of levels.

You can learn more about the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch and how to become a partner by visiting <http://www.seafoodwatch.org/>.