

McBattle to build a McDonald's: French island torn over burger chain

By Angélique Chrisafis, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.10.18

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A worker shows the McBaguette, the French 'baguette' sold by US fast food giant McDonald's in their French outlets on April 10, 2012 at a McDonald's restaurant in Paris. Photo by: Eric Piermont/AFP/Getty Images

Residents of a French island are fighting to keep McDonald's off the menu.

Île d'Oléron is the second-biggest island in France. It is popular with tourists.

The fast food restaurant company has been hoping to build a restaurant there for years.

However, many locals say it would go against their goals. They are hoping to make their island more environmentally friendly. They say McDonald's does not help them achieve that.

Island Opposes "Unhealthy" Chain

Some people on the island made T-shirts with anti-burger sayings.

"Oléron is a beautiful place, it's important to protect it," said Nicolas, who lives on the island. He says the island is trying to make more fresh food that is grown locally. It is also trying to create zero waste. He says these simpler, alternative ways of living don't match with what McDonald's does — producing huge amounts of cheap, unhealthy food.

Leading the fight against the fast food giant is Grégory Gendre. He's the mayor of the small town of Dolus-d'Oléron. Gendre first refused planning permission for a McDonald's drive-through restaurant in 2014. This month, the courts will decide if a McDonald's can be built.

Last autumn, a French court ruled that the town had no legal reason to stop McDonald's. The town must grant permission for it to start building or face fines of about \$350 per day. The mayor appealed. A court decision is expected soon.

Meanwhile, tensions are rising.

More Environmentally Friendly Options On Island

Gendre once worked for the environmental group Greenpeace. He promised to set up an alternative restaurant to McDonald's. This restaurant would be more environmentally friendly and sustainable, he said. Sustainability refers to the necessary balance between humans and nature that must be maintained for both to survive.

Gendre said he had majority support to keep McDonald's off the island.

However, some islanders say everyone should have the right to eat a Big Mac if they choose.

France has a complex relationship with McDonald's.

About 20 years ago, the activist farmer José Bové made headlines. He trashed a half-built McDonald's building in southern France in 1999. At that time, he was protesting the U.S., which had taxed French cheese and other European farm goods. Bové's attack on McDonald's "crap food" was a response to this tax.

Since then, McDonald's has become greatly successful in France. It serves 2 million meals a day there.

Mayor Vs. The Burger Giant

Gendre was elected four years ago. He aimed to turn Dolus into an example for sustainable living. It produces food locally for schools, lowers carbon emissions and reduces waste.

McDonald's represents an old, outdated way of living, he said. He suggested a McDonald's drive-through would encourage the burning of more fossil fuels, contributing to global warming. Fossil fuels are natural fuels like oil, gas and wood. Burning them creates greenhouse gases, which cause global warming.

With Earth heating up, scientists say ice is melting faster on Earth's oceans. The ocean levels are rising. Gendre said the Île d'Oléron would be the first to suffer from rising sea levels and the increasing amount of plastic waste washing up at sea. "If we want to survive as an island, we have to do things differently," he said.

The planned drive-through would be built far from the island's vineyards and beaches. The mayor says the restaurant would increase traffic issues and the potential risk of accidents.

Emilie Mariot, a farmer who has 100 rare sheep on the island, said: "My fight against McDonald's is not about going to war, it's about finding alternatives – looking back to tradition, learning from how people lived on the island before."

Some Islanders Want A Big Mac

At a hair stylist's studio, one woman said banning McDonald's was wrong: "Everyone should have the right to choose what they eat."

At a bowling alley near the proposed McDonald's site, the manager, Jean-Michel Arnaud, said: "You can't stop people eating what they choose." McDonald's might bring jobs, he said.

One restaurant owner in the north of the island felt smaller fast food restaurants could close if McDonald's arrived, with people losing jobs.

McDonald's has not commented publicly on the matter.

Quiz

1 Read the section "Mayor Vs. The Burger Giant."

Which sentence from the section shows that opening a McDonald's on Île d'Oléron could pose a safety threat?

- (A) McDonald's represents an old, outdated way of living, he said.
- (B) "If we want to survive as an island, we have to do things differently," he said.
- (C) The planned drive-through would be built far from the island's vineyards and beaches.
- (D) The mayor says the restaurant would increase traffic issues and the potential risk of accidents.

2 Read the section "More Environmentally Friendly Options On Island."

Which detail from the section supports the idea that McDonald's is popular in France?

- (A) Gendre once worked for the environmental group Greenpeace. He promised to set up an alternative restaurant to McDonald's.
- (B) However, some islanders say everyone should have the right to eat a Big Mac if they choose.
- (C) About 20 years ago, the activist farmer José Bové made headlines. He trashed a half-built McDonald's building in southern France in 1999.
- (D) Since then, McDonald's has become greatly successful in France. It serves 2 million meals a day there.

3 According to the article, what effect could a McDonald's have on the smaller restaurants on the island?

- (A) It could cause them to lose money or go out of business.
- (B) It could encourage them to change their menus.
- (C) It could cause their workers to quit and work at McDonald's instead.
- (D) It could encourage them to lower their prices.

- 4 What caused Grégory Gendre to deny planning permission for a McDonald's drive-through restaurant?
- (A) his belief that McDonald's is not well-liked by the locals on the island
 - (B) his belief that McDonald's food does not taste very good
 - (C) his belief that McDonald's could harm the environment on the island
 - (D) his belief that a McDonald's drive-through would take up too much space