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Environment

Guide developed using Greenport restaurants helps businesses reduce plastic imprint

by Kelly Zegers | 06/13/2018 6:00 AM

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A guide to help restaurants reduce their plastic-waste footprint was developed using four Greenport restaurants to demonstrate how that effort can benefit business.

Last year, the Product Stewardship Institute partnered with the Greenport eateries — Lucharitos, Bruce & Son, Tikal.1 and Little Creek Oysters — in the Trash Free Waters Project.

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The institute is a national nonprofit that aims to solve waste management problems by encouraging product design changes and creating dialogue among stakeholders.

The project kicked off in February 2017 and resulted in the publication of a Marine Debris Reduction Guide for Restaurants, which was put together by Megan Byers, PSI's associate for policy, programs and outreach. She used the four local restaurants as case studies to give businesses around the country examples of how plastic output can be effectively reduced.

"They can be leaders," PSI founder and CEO Scott Cassel said. "They can show others that they're taking one step at a time and it's amazing how easy some of this can be once you start to look for it and your intention to start to reduce plastics is there."

The guide offers three steps towards making that happen: assessing the operation's plastic footprint and creating a plan to eliminate unnecessary plastic packaging and single-use items; reducing the amount of plastics that are given away; replacing disposable with

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reusable items; and switching to items that are either recycled or made of biodegradable materials.

Eateries found that they saved a few thousand dollars annually by purchasing fewer plastic products.

Lucharitos took to social media to announce it would phase out plastic straws and bottles at both its Greenport and Aquebogue locations and would provide paper straws only on request, according to PSI.

“If you’re operating a food business, but don’t care what happens to your product — both the food and the packaging it comes in — you will be left in the dust,” owner Marc Lamaina said in the guide. “It’s in every business’s best interest to make these changes, if for no other reason than to keep up with the ones who are. The sooner we all jump in and go green with packaging, the sooner the price of green products goes down and it’s easier for all to jump in the game.”

At brunch spot Bruce & Son, owners Kassata and Scott Bollman ask takeout customers if they need bags and disposable foodware. If they do, birchwood cutlery, sugarcane pulp cups with reusable lids and paper bags are offered.

The Bollmans found that offering products other than plastic makes them stand out, according to PSI.

Tikal.1, which serves traditional Central American dishes, replaced its disposable plastic table covers with handmade Guatemalan cloths, and gave up foam cups and containers and plastic bags in favor of paper. By doing so, according to the guide, they eliminated 2,000 pounds of plastic waste annually.

“We used to just give out plastic and didn’t think about the damage to the sea,” manager Helen Gonzales said. “Once we learned about the impact, we had to do the right thing. Switching to new products requires an initial investment, but it’s worth it. We’ve actually gotten more customers coming in because they heard about our effort.”

As for Little Creek Oysters, owners Rosalie Rung and Ian Wile have found that by reducing plastics in favor of more reusable products, \$5,507 can be saved annually. They opted for wooden spears over plastic forks and replaced plastic tasting spoons with metal ones, according to the guide. They also replaced disposable plastic oyster bags with reusable boxes.

They serve plastic only on request, creating a opportunity to educate customers, Mr. Wile noted.

“If you’re trying to figure out what plastics to tackle, look at your floor,” Ms. Rung advises in the guide. “If it’s landing on the ground, it’s going in the water.”

The guide, released as part of a movement to cut down on plastic pollution in the oceans, especially plastic straws, is picking up steam, with both businesses and individuals deciding either not to use straws at all or to find a reusable or biodegradable option.

The eastern Long Island chapter of the Surfrider Foundation is promoting a “Strawless Summer” campaign, noting that volunteers collected 922 discarded plastic straws at a recent beach cleanup in Greenport. The foundation’s goal is to reduce the number of plastic straws used by restaurants on the East End, according to its website.

On the North Fork, Little Creek Oysters and Peconic Cellar Door have pledged to go strawless, according to Surfrider’s map of participating restaurants.

Other local restaurants have also taken the initiative to rethink their plastic output. American Beech switched to paper straws before the start of the season, owner Brent Pelton said. “We certainly do what we can to cut down,” he said.

Copies of the guide are free can be sent by email to those fill out a request form on the PSI website:

productstewardship.us/page/RestaurantGuide.

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*Photo caption: Ian Wile, of Little Creek Oysters, stands on the docks.
(Suffolk Times file photo)*

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Jeanne Markel

Fantastic! Thank you to Bruce & Son, Little Creek Oysters, Lucharitos, Tikal.1, and the Trash Free Waters Project!

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Sharon Sailor

Front Street also being 'another local restaurant' has been using paper bags for several years, has asked if utensils are required since they opened, has been using straws that are compostable and made from plant materials for 2+ years

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Joey Pinter

what a great idea. dontcha just love people thinking on their feet?

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David Berson

Thank you folks. The amount of floating refuse in the Bay increases yearly. I net plastic, styrofoam, and god knows what else every time I'm on the water. Let'sgo Back to paper and cardboard and slowly re-educate ourselves.

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Benja Schwartz

Win, Win, Win!!! But the real point is to be aware of, understand and respect the interests of others. Yes, externalities have economic impacts, but environmental impacts are more important. And, the most important part of this initiative is the awareness created. Human potential for pleasure of being a loving (and loved) inhabitant of planet earth.

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