



5 EASY STEPS TO
**REDUCE PLASTIC
& BENEFIT
YOUR BUSINESS**

A GUIDE FOR RESTAURANTS AND EATERIES





Is this relatable? We use disposable food ware only for a few minutes.

Contents

Introduction: Why Reduce Plastic?	3
Step 1 Assess your plastic footprint	4
Step 2 Create a reduction plan	5
Step 3 Make it your policy	10
Step 4 Clue in your customers	13
Results from Real Restaurants	18
Step 5 Go the extra mile	22
Take-Out Waste and COVID-19	24
Additional Resources	26

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Product Stewardship Institute (PSI)

[PSI](#) is a national nonprofit that reduces the health, safety, and environmental impacts of consumer products with a strong focus on sustainable end-of-life management. Headquartered in Boston, MA, we take a unique approach to solving waste management problems by facilitating stakeholder dialogues and encouraging producer responsibility. We design, implement, evaluate, strengthen, and promote both legislative and voluntary product stewardship initiatives across North America.

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We only use it for a moment, but plastic always comes back.



Don't throw money in the trash!

- Reduce packaging costs
- Enrich the dining experience
- Prevent unsightly litter near your business
- Lower waste collection costs
- Save staff time
- Boost marketing
- Tap into the green market and foster customer loyalty
- Get ahead of regulations
- Be a community role model
- Protect food from contamination

Despite our best intentions, some of the packaging we give customers will be littered. 80% of this debris is plastic.

Whether your restaurant is right on the beach or hundreds of miles from the coast, wind and rain inevitably sweep cups, bottles, bags, straws, utensils, and other packaging into our oceans, rivers, and lakes, where it injures animals and pollutes the water.

Plastic adsorbs pollutants (like pesticides and heavy metals). It carries pathogens and small invasive species to new homes. Eventually, it breaks into tiny bits that contaminate soil and water. Plus, ocean animals mistake it for food. It accumulates up the food chain, so the plastic (with toxic pollutants!) ends up in people when we eat seafood.

By reducing the plastic you give to customers, you will help reduce litter, protect the quality your food, and protect the landscapes and wildlife that support tourism – all while saving money and helping your business thrive.

Step 1: Assess your plastic footprint



Step 1

Assess Your Plastic Footprint

Knowing your Plastic Footprint will help you identify:

- How many disposable plastics you use
- How much you buy – and how much it costs you
- Which products to target

To begin, visit the online Plastic Footprint Tool:

Calculate your plastic footprint

tiny.cc/MyPlasticFootprint

The screenshot shows the 'Plastic Footprint' tool interface. At the top, it says 'Share the Plastic Footprint Tool:' with social media icons. Below are logos for 'PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP INSTITUTE' and 'NEIWPCC New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission'. The main heading is 'Step 1 - Assess Your Plastic Footprint'. The text explains that the tool will help identify: types of disposable plastic used, quantity and cost, and products to target. It also mentions Step 2: Create a Plastic Reduction Plan. A link is provided to download a guide for restaurants and eateries. The form has three sections: 1. Name of business (with a text box containing 'Oodles of Noodles'), 2. Type of service (with radio buttons for 'Dine-in only', 'Take-out only', and 'Dine-in and take-out'), and 3. Email address (with a text box containing 'me@email.com'). At the bottom, it says 'Let's get started!' and has a 'Next' button.

Assess your Plastic Footprint wherever you are, on any device.

First, select which disposable plastics you currently use.

Then, enter how many cases you buy each month, how many items per case, and how much each case costs.

That's it! Our Plastic Footprint Tool will automatically calculate your total plastic footprint and email it to you.

Good work. You'll receive your Footprint within minutes. *The email will come from **noreply@surveygizmo.com**. If you don't see it, check your spam/junk folder.*

Step 2: Make a plan



Step 2

Create a Plastic Reduction Plan

Setting Your Goal

Based on your Plastic Footprint, what are the top 2-3 items you use? Prioritize items that customers take off the premises; they are most at risk of becoming litter. Or, pick whatever you're comfortable tackling first! You can always do more later.

Think about how plastic reduction fits into your big picture.

- What past actions successfully reduced disposable items or increased recycling?
- Does your business have a sustainability or waste reduction plan?
- Ask your staff what waste issues they see.
- Does your town, county, or state regulate disposable plastics (ex. a plastic bag ban or fee)?

The Plan

There are four basic strategies to reduce plastic (and other disposables, too):

1. **Eliminate** unnecessary packaging and single-use items.
2. **Reduce** the amount you give away.
3. **Replace** disposables with durable, reusable items.
4. **Switch** to items that are recyclable or made of materials that won't persist in the environment.



Moving away from plastic, which many people consider “cheap” and artificial, can enhance your food presentation and dining experience.

Many plastic reduction strategies are free, cost effective, or cost neutral. Other changes may require an upfront investment but can *save you money* after a few short weeks or months. Once your plan is in place, review short- and long-term financial projections to evaluate your changes and readjust as needed.

If you choose to purchase reusable dining ware or switch to a new disposable item, think about how the new products will fit your atmosphere and brand.

Use our handy Foodware Cost Calculator to project the cost savings and plastic reduction you'll achieve.

Calculate your costs & savings

tiny.cc/FoodwareCalculator

Examples & tips



Step 2 – Eliminate & Reduce Disposables

For each item you identified in “Setting Your Goal,” choose option(s) from the list on the following pages. **The list is organized from most effective to least effective.** Most plastic reduction plans will incorporate a variety of strategies, which will vary per product.

1 - Eliminate.

The most cost effective and sustainable packaging is no packaging!



VS.



2 - Reduce.

1. Serve the item only upon request (only when the customer asks).
2. Ask the customer if they need the item instead of automatically giving it.
3. Only use what is needed, when it's needed, for the right number of people, ex. never double bag; ask how many are in a group before giving cutlery; give only the type of cutlery needed for the order (only a spoon for soup, fork for salad); serve lids only for kids.
4. Use self-serve dispensers that release one item at a time instead of open containers. These encourage customers to take only what they need, instead of grabbing a handful.
5. On or near dispensers, remind customers to take only what they need and consider the environment (see p. 14 for examples).



VS.



+



Step 2 – Replace Disposables with Reusable Options



3 - Replace.

1. Replace disposable items with glass, ceramic, stainless steel, wood, or durable plastic versions.
2. Give disposables only for take-out. Use reusable dining ware for all dine-in service.
3. Encourage customers to bring their own reusable items:
 - Offer promotions, ex. a discount, freebie, fill any size container for a flat rate. Get creative!
 - Charge 5-25 cents for disposable plastics. **Fees are far more effective at changing consumer behavior than promotions.** *This option may be more accepted if stores in your area already charge for products like plastic or paper bags.*
 - Market your ability to refill their water bottles, or accept personal containers for take-out.
4. Sell branded products like bags, mugs, and to-go containers, or set up a small deposit system or discount for patrons who bring them back. This will greatly enhance your brand recognition and customer loyalty, and possibly become a new revenue stream!
5. Replace condiment packets with bulk dispensers, ex. a thermos of milk or bottle of ketchup.



Customers can transfer food from a plate to their own container (NOT directly from shared food sources like buffets). But if **you** put food in their container, you must either sanitize the container or train your staff to prevent contamination. Never let kitchen utensils touch the customer's container. If an accident occurs, immediately sanitize exposed items. Contact your health department with questions.

More reuse tips:

Purchase products in containers that your supplier can take back for reuse. Tell your supplier that you do not want excess packaging.

Re-incorporate disposable items into business operations, ex. turn old glass bottles into holders for straws, condiments, or flowers.

Seek out reusable to-go programs for cups and takeout containers, ex. [Vessel](#), [OZZI](#), or [Go Box](#). See p. 25 for more!

Step 2 – Switch to Less Harmful Disposable Products

4 - Switch.

1. Choose plant products over compostable plastic, as they decompose much better in compost and the environment:

- Bagasse (sugarcane fiber)
- Wheat straw
- Silver grass (miscanthus)
- Palm leaf
- Bamboo
- Wood
- Paper (uncoated)

Depending on your area, these products can be only slightly more expensive than plastic. They can even be cost neutral or save money *if you also reduce how much you use (see p. 5 for cost-calculator).*

Make sure the product is 100% plant material. Avoid products (ex. corn, cassava, and other plant starches) that are blended with plastic filler.

2. If plant products or composting are not available, choose materials that are recyclable in your area. **Ask your recycling hauler which products they accept. Most recyclers cannot process plastic cutlery, straws, and stirrers due to their small size, and most will not accept items that have food residue on them.**

Compostable Plastic: Think twice before buying

*Only offer compostable plastic **if** your business and the surrounding area collect compost, **AND** your compost facility accepts the products you choose!*

Compostable plastics tend to be pricey. Don't be swindled! **They do not degrade in the environment better than conventional plastic.** They are designed only to break down under specific industrial compost conditions, and not all industrial facilities can process them.

Compostable plastics can also confuse your customers. They are not recyclable, but they look like products that are. When put in the recycling bin, compostable plastic can ruin an entire batch of recyclables since they are designed to break down over time.

If you want to use compostable plastic, only use products that are certified by the [Biodegradable Products Institute](#) (BPI).

Avoid common misconceptions:

Beware of products labeled "biodegradable," "oxo-degradable," "degradable," "decomposable," or make vague marketing claims that are not certified by a third party. They are NOT compostable.

Even if a product is "bioplastic" (synthesized from natural materials like corn or sugarcane), that doesn't mean it's compostable. **Before you buy, check BPI.**



Step 2 – Additional Considerations



Little Creek Oysters (Greenport, NY) uses branded products. See p. 21 for their story.

Many suppliers offer custom printing for reusable, recyclable, and compostable products. Prices depend on order size or rates negotiated via contract.

Use only unwrapped straws and cutlery to reduce plastic, save money, and save time cleaning up dropped wrappers. Keep unwrapped products in a dispenser or behind the counter for sanitation. If you want to provide a wrapped option, serve it only on request.

Many businesses have eliminated plastic straws. Some customers may need a straw for medical reasons. Serve reusable or paper straws on request. Reusable straws typically come with cleaning wands, which allow for easy cleaning.

Seek products (especially paper) that are uncoated, or coated with wax or clay instead of plastic, and that are unbleached.

Seek paper and wood products certified sustainable by the [Forest Stewardship Council](#).

Choose products with recycled content to support recycling.

Avoid products made from polystyrene (a type of plastic commonly known as “styrofoam,” but it can also be clear and rigid – look for the #6 recycling symbol). Styrene is a neurotoxin and probable carcinogen. It leaks into food and drinks when exposed to heat, alcohol, fats, or oils.

BPA-free? Be wary. The plastic additive bisphenol-A (BPA) is famous for seeping into food and drinks. It has been linked to a slew of health issues, including reproductive, immunity, and neurological problems. But it turns out that common BPA replacements (like BPS and BPF) may have similar or worse effects. Avoid this problem by purchasing non-plastic products.

Avoid fluorinated compounds (PFAS). Bamboo, uncoated paper, clear PLA (polylactic acid), paper coated with clay or PLA, and palm leaf consistently test as no or low-fluorine. Consult the Center for Environmental Health’s [Safer Foodware Guide](#) for further guidance.

All disposable items have environmental impacts.

Pair replacement strategies with reduction and reuse.

Worried whether compostables actually work?

Most companies offer samples! Continual innovation in food packaging ensures that compostables stand up just as well as conventional products. Pay attention to the storage instructions. Some products may not perform well if stored where it’s too hot or too moist. But remember, don’t offer compostables unless your community collects them.



Find new suppliers



Step 3

Make it Your Policy

Now that your plan is in place, update your official purchasing policies.

Feel free to use our suggested language below. Your Disposable Products Policy should include specific guidelines and goals for reducing waste, including your plastic reduction plan. Ensure that other policies (like contracting procedures, purchasing documents, and product specifications) do not conflict with it. Remove obstacles or add language as needed to harmonize your policies.

Your policy is a handy reference for you and your staff. Revisit and update it as necessary for greatest impact and to ensure that the procedures are actually followed. Over time, your business needs may change, new situations can arise, and new sustainable products will become available.

Download the sample policy

bit.ly/FoodwarePolicy

[Business Name] Disposable Products Policy

Policy Statement [Business name] is committed to preventing waste through the efficient use of natural resources. We achieve this by:

1. Eliminating and minimizing the use of disposable plastics, wherever possible;
2. Seeking products made from materials less harmful to the environment; and
3. Preferring products that conserve natural resources.

Procedure The [Owner/ Manager/Procurement Officer] is responsible for overseeing the intent of this policy. The [Owner/Manager/Procurement Officer] is responsible for synchronizing the efforts of staff in eliminating disposable plastic, minimizing its use, and seeking less harmful materials. New materials should be evaluated for cost and price, as well as environmental impacts, to determine the best value.*

Protocols All [Business Name] staff will ensure that daily activities and purchases made are in compliance with this policy by following these protocols:

1. Avoid purchasing unnecessary items
2. Provide customers with reusable products instead of disposables whenever possible
3. Reduce the use of disposables by:
 - a. [Your plastic reduction plan here (ex. serving straws only on request; asking before giving utensils)]
4. Seek alternatives to plastic. Analyze options for optimal environmental, financial, and practical performance.
5. Ensure that disposable products (be they recyclable or compostable) are compatible with local waste infrastructure. Consult your local government, waste hauler, or recycling/composting facilities when unsure.

Other Preferable Environmental Criteria When considering new/alternative products, consider all of the following characteristics to maximize environmental sustainability and cost effectiveness:

- Includes recycled content. Prioritize products with the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled content.
- Made of natural materials, recyclable, or certified compostable. Paper products must not be coated with plastic.
- Conserves energy, water, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions
- Chlorine-free manufacturing
- [Other considerations here]**

*PSI's [Foodware Cost Calculator](#) makes evaluating costs easy

**For ideas, see "Additional Considerations" on page 9.

Step 3 – Find a Supplier for New Products

Find a Supplier for Plastic-free Products

Start by asking your current supplier what they offer. If they don't have what you need, look online or ask other restaurant owners in your area which local suppliers they use. If your current supplier does not carry these items, request that they start. If the options are too expensive, ask fellow business owners if they'd be willing to purchase jointly in bulk with you, so you can both enjoy a lower price.

The market for sustainable products might be limited in your area, so it may be tricky to find what you're looking for. But nationwide, the options are growing as more restaurants seek sustainable products. If you can't find a local option, look for a national supplier or online vendor. Often, you can buy sustainable products directly from their manufacturers.

If you prefer to get all your supplies from one vendor, most large supply companies now stock at least a small selection of plastic-free options for a range of products.



Step 3 – Update Your Facilities

Your facility and staff also contribute to whether your plastics will end up in the environment. Below are steps to make proper disposal convenient for your staff and customers once plastic reduction is your policy. Provide bins both inside and outside if appropriate. Even if your business produces little waste front of house, put bins near the door for customers carrying outside items.

Facilities	
Maintenance	Maintain and beautify the establishment – a well-maintained, attractive space fosters a sense of personal responsibility and reduces littering behavior. Litter begets litter.
Trash	A clearly labeled bin will show pictures of items that cannot be recycled or composted at your business and indicate that these items are headed for the landfill.
Recycling	If you do not currently recycle, we strongly recommend that you start. Recycling can save you money on trash removal fees. Ask your trash hauler or building maintenance crew if they can take recyclable materials, and which products they accept. A clearly labeled bin will show images of the recyclable packaging you use at your business.
Composting	If composting is available in your area, provide a compost bin. A clearly labeled bin will show images of food scraps and any compostable packaging used at your business. Pay attention to your compost program’s limitations for packaging.
Hydration Stations	Install a drinking fountain or sink that can easily accommodate refillable bottles.
Messaging	Signage can be on the packaging, on a product dispenser, or near trash bins. Servers can also tell customers how to properly dispose of trash when they finish eating.

Employee Training	
Cleanliness	Ensure consistent grounds and facility maintenance, cleaning, and trash storage.
Customer Interactions	Train your staff on proper disposal of the items used at your business. If they don’t know which bin to put something in, they won’t be able to answer customer questions.
Education	Your staff should understand that the presence of litter hurts your brand’s reputation.
Lead by Example	When your staff disposes of items properly, it shows your customers how to do it.
Listen to Staff Ideas	Your staff constantly interacts with customers. They are in the best position to identify new opportunities to reduce waste and maintain a litter-free facility.

Step 4: Clue in your customers 

Step 4

Clue in your Customers

Educate Customers & Promote Your Efforts

Customers love it when you support a good cause. More people than ever before are seeking and demanding sustainable practices. Let your customers know that by supporting your business they can not only enjoy delicious food, but also support a clean, healthy environment!

Your staff can explain the changes to customers when they serve them. Put a message on your menu, counter, tables, walls, window, website, or social media to explain the changes. Ask enthusiastic customers to share your social media posts and spread the word about plastic pollution to their friends, family, and local media.



Greenport, NY 5th graders drew this window decal for restaurants reducing plastic with PSI.



Even if your customers are used to disposables, most will understand or even celebrate your decision once you explain it to them. (After all, whose junk drawer *isn't* stuffed with unused condiment packets and plastic cutlery?) The rest will appreciate the option to receive disposables upon request.

Pay attention to customers' comments and requests online and in person. Implement their suggestions where possible and let them know you've done so.

To generate lots of responses and let customers know you're listening, consider sharing a short survey on social media or your website, or hand customers a paper survey and pencil when they pay. You can keep it anonymous, or tie survey responses to a promotion (ex. chance to win a free meal, everyone who enters gets a coupon, etc.).

Lucharitos (a taqueria + bar in Greenport, NY) announced its new straw policy on social media. See p. 18 for their story.

Customer Education Templates



Step 4 – Customer Education Templates

In-House Signage

Posting signage around your restaurant is a great way to let your customers know about the changes you've made. Working with restaurants in Buffalo, NY, PSI drafted sample customer education materials you can use for inspiration or modify for your own establishment. Below are samples of postcards and table tents, which you could post anywhere in your restaurant to let customers know what you're up to and encourage them to reduce and reuse.

See sample signage

bit.ly/CustomerEdSigns



This sample postcard could be posted next to a straw dispenser. Studies have shown that this type of signage can reduce straw and utensil usage by up to 50%!



JOEY IS MAKING CHANGES!

*You may have noticed a change in our tableware
– we’ve made our silverware and cups reusable!*

“Marine Debris” is not just a problem in the oceans – trash is found in the Great Lakes, too. In fact, an estimated 22 million pounds of plastic enter the Great Lakes every year. Some of the most common items are from food service – things like forks, straws and containers. These plastics break down and contaminate our drinking water!

We’re doing our part to keep Lake Erie clean by reducing our plastic footprint – thank you for your support!



A sample table tent to help alert dine-in customers about in-house changes.

Step 4 – Customer Education Templates

Make sure any signage you post in-house is in line with your branding. Download any of these samples for postcards, table tents, or posters as inspiration.

Once your customers are aware of your commitment to reducing your plastic footprint, they can help you spread the word. Encourage them to share your progress with a custom hashtag on social media – this can also help drive new eco-conscious customers through your doors.

See more samples

bit.ly/CustomerEdTableTents



Results from Real Restaurants



Results from Real Restaurants

We piloted these steps with four businesses in Greenport, NY.
Here's what they accomplished.

Lucharitos

"Lucharito" loosely translates to "little fighter." This feisty modern taqueria and bar dishes up delicious food with minimal plastic:

- Ask customers if they need to-go foodware
- Switched to paper carryout bags, compostable paper take-out containers, and unwrapped BPI-certified compostable take-out cutlery
- Switched from wrapped cutlery packets to unwrapped cutlery
- Stopped serving straws in water cups, then phased out plastic straws and serve paper straws by request
- Discontinued the sale of plastic bottles

\$3,223 annual cost savings

\$99 additional savings in reduced yearly waste fees

632,080 plastic items prevented per year

2,203 pounds of plastic waste prevented annually

Boosted operational efficiency + saved staff time

Fewer plastic straws = clog-free sinks



Before



After

And they're not stopping there! Lucharitos plans to install a filtered water station for customers to refill their reusable water bottles. Lucharitos will also sell branded reusable water bottles in the restaurant.

Don't let anyone tell you that plastic reduction will hurt your business. In the middle of our project, Lucharitos opened a second location, which does mostly takeout – and instantly applied its plastic reduction strategies.

"We are all influencers. I use this on social media as a competitive advantage."

*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.** 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."

– Marc Lamaina, Owner



Results from Real Restaurants

Bruce & Son

Bruce & Son is a progressive upscale brunch place. Their locally-inspired menu is elegant and plastic free:

- Ask take-out customers if they need bags and disposable foodware
- For take-out service, uses Forest Stewardship Council-certified birch wood cutlery, bagasse (sugarcane pulp) condiment cups with recyclable PET plastic lids, and branded paper bags
- Switched to paper straws, self-serve
- Streamlined cup sizes – only use one size for hot and cold cups

With the exception of recyclable PET condiment cup lids, all of Bruce & Son's new disposable take-out products are made of naturally biodegradable materials with no synthetic linings!

Plastic-lined paper is still their best option for hot cups. They wanted to switch to wax-coated paper cold cups, but the current foodware market did not yield an attractive design to fit their brand. Although paper hot cup lids exist in other parts of the world, only plastic lids were available in Greenport, NY.

Rather than use plastic-lined paper cold cups, which are not recyclable, they are sticking with recyclable plastic cups – at least, until the U.S. packaging market catches up with the rest of the world.

39,000 plastic items prevented per year

1,145 pounds of plastic waste reduced annually

Increased operational efficiency

Don't have to order disposables as often

Competitive branding advantage

Only 50% of customers take straws

"We wouldn't have a business without tourists. We have a responsibility to keep the water clean. Plastic is cheap, but that doesn't make it the right option.

If you need more reason than that, you'll stand out when you eliminate plastic. You don't often see paper straws or wood utensils. Even our employees were thrilled when we announced the changes.

You'll always save money when you switch to reusables. The cost of washing dishes is negligible. And if you're worried about the cost of paper, do the math. The price increase isn't that much, especially when you realize that you'll use less to begin with. When you offer plastic, people just take it. You use more, and you have to buy more often. But they think twice when you offer nicer products."

– Kassata and Scott Bollman, Owners



Results from Real Restaurants



Tikal.1

This cozy, family-run restaurant serves mouthwatering traditional Central American dishes. The owner painted its colorful murals. Here's how they reduce plastic:

- Ask before serving take-out cutlery, straws, and napkins
- Replaced disposable plastic table covers with hand-made Guatemalan cloths. Washing them is a seamless part of the staff routine. No additional labor needed.
- Took condiment packets off the table, implementing a self-serve area
- Switched from polystyrene foam (aka "styrofoam") containers to aluminum and paper
- Switched from polystyrene foam cups to paper
- Switched from plastic carryout bags to paper

Attracted new customers!

\$3,578 annual cost savings

\$90 additional savings in reduced yearly waste fees

52,008 plastic items prevented per year

2,003 pounds of plastic waste reduced annually

50-60% of customers decline straws + cutlery

Enhanced atmosphere and enjoyment for customers + staff

Don't have to order disposables as often



"We used to just give out plastic and didn't think about the damage to the sea. 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 efforts."

If you're unsure about reducing plastic, definitely give it a try. Just by putting straws, cutlery, and napkins behind the counter, we halved the amount we have to order, and we don't have to restock nearly as often."

– Helen Gonzales, Manager

Results from Real Restaurants

Little Creek Oysters

Upbeat, relaxed, and a little sassy (after all, their slogan is “Shuck Yourself”), Little Creek Oysters serves fresh seafood with minimal plastic:

- No longer serve plastic for inside or outside service
- Keep a small inventory of plastic for emergencies only
- Increased inventory of reusable wine glasses, pint glasses, and mugs
- Serve plastic straws only upon request
- Replaced plastic forks with wooden spears and plastic taster spoons with metal
- Replaced oyster bags with reusable oyster boxes

Their biggest challenge was space for reusables. After seeking nearby storage, they reconfigured their space. Stackable products like cups are easy, but mugs are harder.

Most of Little Creek Oysters’ reusables are beautifully branded (see p. 9). Sometimes, people swipe a spoon or shot glass, especially in the outside seating area on a big holiday weekend. Ian thinks it’s flattering, while Rosalie finds it annoying. Both agree that it’s not a significant financial impact, and see it as an advertising benefit. They admit that you can run out of inventory quicker than expected on a busy day when people steal things, but in the end, it’s worth it to provide an excellent dining experience and to stop serving plastic outside. They still keep a small supply for overwhelming days like the 4th of July when it’s hard to keep up with the washing.

Because their business is at once oyster farm, restaurant, and retail market, the owners took their efforts to the next level by reducing disposables across production. They replaced disposable plastic mesh oyster bags, which can be easily lost at sea during harvest, with durable boxes that are reusable, stackable, less likely to get lost, and printed with their logo for enhanced brand recognition. Plus, unlike the bags, the boxes are recyclable.



Before



After

\$5,507 annual cost savings

\$113 additional savings in reduced yearly waste fees

233,400 plastic items prevented per year

2,509 pounds of plastic waste reduced annually

Reduced plastic from production to retail

Enhanced dining experience

Competitive branding advantage

Only 1 in 10 customers ask for a straw

Don't have to order disposables as often



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

Any business can experiment. See what works for you. Start with small changes. Every business has its own way of doing things, but with a little thought, you can make a big difference not only for your own image and bottom line, but also for the world.”

– Rosalie Rung, Owner

“We tell our customers why we serve plastic only on request. It’s an opportunity to educate them.”

With reusable products, we don’t have to worry about keeping up the disposable inventory. In the end, the dining experience is so much better.”

– Ian Wile, Owner

Step 5: Go the Extra Mile



Step 5: The Extra Mile

Tackle plastic in your community

Voluntary Strategies

There are many ways to educate fellow business owners and residents in your community about plastic.

When they understand the issue, more people will start using reusable products and support plastic reduction efforts. Here are some ideas.

You can share facts, graphics, videos and other content from environmental groups like [Plastic Pollution Coalition](#), [5 Gyres](#), [Lonely Whale](#), [Clean Seas](#), [Clean Water Action](#), [One Green Planet](#), and [Surfrider](#).



Your merchandise can be educational, too!

Business education

Talk to fellow business owners about how plastic reduction benefits you and give them this Guide.

Cooperatively purchase bulk eco-friendly products with other businesses to enjoy lower prices.

Ask your Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement District, or other business groups to educate their members about plastic-free business practices and incentivize the switch to green products.

Reach out to environmental groups in your area, or your local government official(s) in charge of sustainability, recycling, or waste reduction. Ask them to create a certification or ranking system (e.g., Gold, Silver, Bronze) to award businesses that are reducing plastic and to help customers identify eco-friendly dining options.

Public education

Nothing beats firsthand experience. Host a litter cleanup!

Share information about plastic pollution and how to stop it on social media. Educate your customers on your plastic reduction efforts, and how they can reduce or refuse plastic every day.

Screen a documentary, ex. [A Plastic Ocean](#), [Plastic Paradise](#), [STRAWS](#), or [Divide in Concord](#).

Reach out to schools and teachers. You or a group of local business owners can teach kids about why you are reducing plastic at your restaurant. Local environmental groups will be thrilled to provide educational materials or join you in class.

Tell people where they can recycle bags and plastic wrapping. You can use [existing tools and guidance from WRAP](#) (Wrap Recycling Action Program).

Policy strategies



Step 5 – Tackle plastic in your community

Mandatory Strategies

A written policy within your organization and legislation in your community are more effective than voluntary strategies because everyone must participate.

Legislation also levels the playing field – so responsible businesses are never at a disadvantage to their competitors.

PSI found the laws below to be strong examples of what state and local governments around the country are enacting to reduce plastic waste.

Get in touch with your local chamber of commerce, business groups, or environmental organizations to discuss the potential for introducing and supporting legislation that will best meet your goals. Encourage municipal, county, and state-level policymakers to consider these policies.

You may replicate and adapt the sample language for your jurisdiction’s unique needs.



Take pictures of plastic litter in your area to demonstrate the problem.

Sample legislative options include:

- Require food ware to be recyclable or compostable
- Ban polystyrene (including “styrofoam”)
- Only provide straws, stirrers, and utensils on request
- Require reusable food ware for onsite dining
- Charge a fee for carryout bags
- Charge a fee for to-go cups
- Eliminate bottled water
- Enact a “Right to Refill” policy

[View sample legislation](#)

bit.ly/PlasticPolicies



“The simple straw seems to be a pathway to enlightenment regarding waste prevention. When a person, business, or government goes through the steps of eliminating the distribution of plastic straws and utensils that are unwanted and unneeded, it opens a new awareness of how wasteful we have been. It opens the door to ‘what’s next, what else can we do?’”

– **Sego Jackson, Seattle Public Utilities, WA**

The Novel Coronavirus & Disruptions to Dine-In Service

In 2020, the outbreak of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 swept the nation and the world. Restaurants were especially hard-hit with forced closures, staff layoffs, and tremendous uncertainty. Many restaurants transitioned to delivery or take-out only models, often for the first time.

Most to-go orders rely on single-use packaging, typically plastic. With the sharp increase in take-out and delivery during the pandemic, associated plastic waste also increased. Where cafes and restaurants remained open, many instituted temporary policies barring customers from bringing their own cups or containers from home to protect employees.

Worker safety should always be top priority. As more information becomes available about COVID-19, health experts affirmed that surface transmission of the virus is thought to be extremely unlikely.

Options for Waste Reduction with a Take-Out Model

For restaurants wishing to reduce plastics use as much as possible during the pandemic, there are still options!

- **Skip disposable cutlery and straws** – you're delivering to customers at home, where they likely already have reusable cutlery to use! Save some money and prevent waste by simply not providing cutlery with take-out or delivery options, or only provide it on request.
- **Hold off on condiment packets** – again, customers may already have commonly-provided condiments such as ketchup, mustard, or soy sauce at home in larger containers. Consider providing condiment sachets or to-go cups only on request to save money and prevent packaging and food waste.
- For pick-up orders, **allowing customers to bag their own orders** in reusable bags saves staff time and reduces customer contact while preventing waste from disposable bags. For contactless deliveries, bags may not be needed if food can simply be placed (in containers) at a customer's door.



The future of re-use post-COVID



The Future of Re-Use Post-COVID-19

Safe, Sustainable Reuse for Take-Out Dining

Reusable food delivery-ware has been the norm for decades in countries like India, where [dabbawalas](#) deliver thousands of home-cooked meals in metal tiffins to office workers every day. As coronavirus spread in the U.S., take-out waste increased as restaurants switched to delivery or take-out models. It soon became apparent that we are not equipped with the widespread systems we need to safely reduce waste in the take-out and delivery sectors. Fortunately, as awareness of plastic pollution has grown many companies have emerged that are attempting to address take-out waste. These companies expressed optimism even during the pandemic, because their programs mean reusable service-ware is thoroughly cleaned and sanitized before restaurant staff or customers use it, which means it's perfectly safe.

Looking for more?

Check out these amazing companies also helping restaurant reduce take-out waste!

- [Green Tiffin](#)
- [Deliver Zero](#)
- [Just Salad](#)

Models for Safe, Sustainable Reuse

U.S. companies have been partnering with restaurants to help reduce take-out waste. During the pandemic, some of these companies were able to *increase* business for restaurants that were forced to operate via delivery or take-out. Customers trust that third-parties like these can properly clean and sanitize food service-ware even when BYO options don't work.

Dispatch Goods (San Francisco, CA)

Dispatch Goods started out as a reusable take-out system for the busy “downtown lunch crowd;” customers could grab their to-go order from participating restaurants in a reusable container they would return at curbside stations throughout the city. When the coronavirus came to the U.S., CEO Lindsey Hoell transitioned the company's model to offering reusable containers for delivery service with corporate partners.



Superfine Tiffins (New York City, NY)

Superfine Tiffins was launched in 2007 by Chef Harpreet Sohal, who came to the U.S. from India and wanted to bring the tradition of delivering home-cooked meals to her new city. The company offers up to a weeks' worth of meals delivered in reusable, returnable tiffins, and can deliver to a customer's work or home. They continued to deliver to people throughout NYC during the pandemic.

Vessel (Boulder, CO)

Vessel offers reusable cups for to-go coffee, tea, etc. from participating cafes – returnable at any participating location. The branded cups contain chips so they can be “checked in” when returned. Vessel was forced to close during the pandemic as participating cafes shut down but expressed optimism that the company would succeed in the future as customers could trust its third-party sanitization model over a bring-your-own cup system.



Reopening for Dine-In? Know the Facts.

The CDC issued guidelines for restaurants reopening after stay-at-home orders ended. Unfortunately, these included the use of disposable menus and service-ware. However, your state will issue its own rules and guidelines that may or may not align with the CDC's! Health experts have stated that reusable dine-in service ware is just as safe as disposables if not safer (because it is cleaned in-house after each use), so be sure to check your local rules and use reusables if you are able. Check out Surfrider's [Guide for Reopening Restaurants Safely with Reusables](#).

Additional resources to help you



Resources

PSI's plastic reduction guide has outlined the steps to take and the knowledge you need to reduce plastic at your restaurant. Use the free resources below to find alternatives to plastic, and to take plastic reduction to the next level:

- Use PSI's [Foodware Cost Calculator](#) to project the money and plastic you will save by reducing disposables and switching to reusable or compostable alternatives.
- Find [certified compostable](#) products through the Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI).
- To avoid hidden hazards in disposable food ware, consult the Center for Environmental Health's [Safer Foodware Guide](#).
- Find paper and wood products certified sustainable by the [Forest Stewardship Council](#).
- Contact Clean Water Action's [ReThink Disposable](#) project, a technical assistance program that helps restaurants reduce disposable products. Their [Reusable Food Serviceware Guide](#), educational graphics, and other helpful resources are available online.
- Join Surfrider's [Ocean Friendly Restaurants](#) program to become a certified "Ocean Friendly Restaurant" and gain national and local recognition.
- Take part in the [Plastic Pollution Coalition](#)'s campaigns to spread the word about plastic pollution and learn about additional actions you can take to stop it.
- Join [Lonely Whale's #StopSucking campaign](#) to challenge your customers to skip the straw.
- Check out 5 Gyres's [Better Alternatives Now List 2.0](#) for more information about the top polluting products and better alternatives.
- For more guidance on restaurant sustainability, visit the [Green Restaurant Association](#).





Thank you.

