

Rethinking Disposables in a Throwaway Society

It happens easily... you're running late to work so you swing through a coffee shop for your morning cup of joe. They hand you a couple mini cream cups, sugar packets, and a plastic stirrer.

Of course you didn't have time to pack your lunch so you run out to the cafe at noon. But you're a little behind on your deadline so you grab a pre-made sandwich in a plastic clamshell and a yogurt to take back to your desk. Seeing you're for take-out, the friendly cashier drops a set of wrapped, disposable cutlery in your bag.

You've been sipping from your reusable water bottle all day but when that 3pm slump hits you decide to grab a soda and a snack from the vending machine...

These things don't feel like a lot in the moment. But when you look in the little can by your desk at the end of the day, it's actually quite full.

I don't say this to make you feel guilty. We're all doing the best we can, but we live in a society that is set up to hand you single-use throwaways at every corner.

But what if instead of the story above, your day looked like this:

You're running late so you swing by the coffee shop on the way to work. You realize you forgot your tumbler but are happy to pay the \$0.50 deposit on your coffee that comes in a returnable jar. You add your cream and sugar from dispensers at a self-serve station and stir it up with a stainless steel spoon that you drop in a "dirty" bin on your way out the door.

At lunch you run to the cafe and grab a pre-made sandwich and a yogurt. The sandwich comes in a standard Gainesville Returnables clamshell and the yogurt is in a Returnables jar. You use the silverware you keep in your desk drawer for just this purpose.

When that 3pm slump hits, you head over to your work's energizing station and make a soda with the sodastream, dropping a dollar in the collection box.

On your way to your parking spot at the end of the day you drop the Returnables clamshell and yogurt jar into a collection bin on the corner. You leave your rinsed out coffee jar in the car for the next time you stop at the shop.

Same day, but you produced zero trash.

That's the power of a society that's built around the idea of reusables. And we can have that, right here in Gainesville!

The use of disposable foodware items is a *massive* problem in the United States. Every single **day** it is estimated that the US alone throws away:

- ❖ 100 million single-use utensils
- ❖ 136 million disposable cups
- ❖ 500 million straws

In order to tackle a problem this big, we can't only ask consumers to stop buying single-use foodware. We have to also move up the waste stream and prevent it from being created in the first place. To do this, we need a coordinated effort from communities, businesses, and governments.

Reusable options in the restaurant and food industry can save *literal tons* of waste.

How do we make the switch? One course of action that can move municipalities large and small forward in a big way is a [single-use foodware and litter reduction ordinance](#) like the one passed in Berkeley, CA.

Single-Use Foodware and Litter Reduction Ordinance - Information Sheet

Single-Use Foodware and Litter Reduction Ordinance

GOAL
REDUCE WASTE AND
LIMIT SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

Why Communities are supporting this type of legislation:

Single-use food and beverage packaging pollutes the environment and harms our health.

- ✔ Preventing waste before it starts
- ✔ Providing local green jobs
- ✔ Protecting local habitat
- ✔ Prioritizing reusables and resource conservation

Components of a Single-Use Foodware and Litter Reduction Ordinance

1. Reusable Foodware for On-Site Dining
2. Front-of-House Recycle and Compost Receptacles
3. BPI-Certified Compostable Foodware for To-go
4. \$0.25 Charge for Disposable Cups
5. Disposable Accessory Items Upon Request

1. Reusable Foodware for On-Site Dining

Prepared Food Vendors offering on-site dining use reusable (durable/washable) foodware to serve customers eating on the premises.

2. Front-of-House Recycle and Compost Receptacles

Prepared Food Vendors that allow self-bussing provide color-coded receptacles for customers to separate their recyclables, compostables, and landfill waste that is generated onsite.

3. BPI-Certified Compostable Foodware for To-go

All take-out foodware must be BPI-Certified Compostable. No single-use plastic allowed. BPI certified compostable foodware are free of fluorinated chemicals.

4. \$0.25 Charge for Disposable Cups

Prepared Food Vendors charge twenty-five cents (\$0.25) for every disposable beverage cup provided. This charge is intended to incentivize customers to utilize reusable cups.

5. Disposable Accessory Items Upon Request

Disposable accessory items (e.g. straws, stirrers, napkins, utensils, condiment cups/packets, cup sleeves, tops, lids, spill plugs, and any other similar accessory or accompanying disposable foodware item used as part of food or beverage service or packaging) are to be provided only upon customer request or at self-serve stations.

Benefits to Prepared Food Vendors

- Reduce disposable food service ware costs
- Improve customers' dining experience
- Prevent litter near your business
- Be a greener business and reduce waste
- Lower waste collection service costs

REUSE IS THE BEST CHOICE FOR THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE - PROFIT, PLANET, AND PEOPLE.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT REUSABLES CAN SAVE RESTAURANTS THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS EACH YEAR!

A [Single-Use Foodware and Litter Reduction Ordinance](#) has the goal to reduce the use of all single-use material and instead promote the use of reusables.

Components of the Berkeley Foodware Ordinance:

- Reusable Foodware For On-Site Dining
- Front-of-House Recycle and Compost Receptacles
- BPI-Certified Compostable Foodware for to-go
- \$0.25 Charge for Disposable Cups
- **Disposable Accessory Items Upon Request**

Read more about it [here!](#)

There are many components to a “Foodware” ordinance (listed just above) and the city of Gainesville is including *one of those components* into their possible upcoming Zero Waste Ordinance: **Accessories Upon Request.**



- *Prepared food providers shall not provide single-use plastic food accessories for dine-in, take-out or delivery, unless the single-use food accessory is specifically requested by the customer or is provided at a customer self-serve station.*
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A Step Further

Now imagine a system where takeout from your favorite local eateries was put in a reusable container. When you're done with it, you simply drop it off at a central locale to be sanitized for reuse. This is Gainesville's future and the future of communities working towards Zero Waste.

- Reusables clamshells!
- Reusable coffee cups!
- The Reuse Service Economy is our future - read about it from [Upstream Solutions](#)

Think this is a little outside the box? Check out these Reusables To-Go Systems already in place:

- [Durham Green To-Go](#)
- [Go Box](#)
- [r.Ware & r.Cup](#)
- [Just Salad](#)
- [Vessel](#)
- [Dispatch Goods](#)
- Article on the [reusables packaging systems for foodware](#).

So what would this mean for local business owners?

Turns out, switching to reusables (or disposables upon request) is financially profitable for restaurants and cafes! In fact, in a study of 121 businesses and 11 institutional dining programs, implementing a reusables system saved money for **100%** of the businesses. This calculation took into account the initial investments to purchase reusable products, increased labor and water usage for dishwashing, and the rate of return from customers.

You can peruse some of these success stories [here](#).

One popular lunch spot found that by putting unwrapped straws in a self-service dispenser with a sign reading "Do you *really* need a straw?", they saw a 43% reduction in straw usage. And

with fewer straws and wrappers in the bus tubs, they discovered the dishwashing process became more efficient.

A popular coffee shop saw net cost savings of \$1,263/year after switching to stainless steel utensils and returnable jars. They've eliminated over 12,300 pieces of single-use foodware.

And the benefits don't stop there.

Some additional perks:

- ❖ Reduced spending on disposables
- ❖ Reduced waste collection costs
- ❖ Increased storage space
- ❖ Improved customer experience
- ❖ Reduced litter near your business
- ❖ Greener reputation

What can YOU do for now?

Keep doing your best to reduce single use products in your life. That may look like:

- Bringing your own grocery and produce bags
- Refusing plastic cutlery and straws
- Carrying a reusable water bottle
- Bringing your own coffee thermos
- Packing a homemade lunch
- Dining in, rather than taking out
- Choosing snacks with less packaging
- Sharing this knowledge with a friend

And if you want to see big changes, let your representatives know you support the Zero Waste Ordinance in Gainesville!