

# reuse wins

**Supplement: The Future of  
Food Service is Reusable**

## The Future of Food Service is Reusable

Today, much of institutional and fast casual dining – and virtually all takeout and delivery – happens using disposable food-service ware. And all those takeout containers, bags, boxes, condiment packets, plastic utensils, cold and hot cups and lids, and napkins add up. **Nearly one trillion disposable food service products are used each year in the United States.**

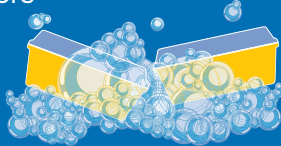
Unfortunately all these disposables come with costs – costs to the environment from natural resource extraction to climate impacts to plastic

pollution; costs to food-service businesses from the ongoing procurement and on-site waste management of disposables; and costs to governments and taxpayers from solid waste costs and litter cleanup. These costs also represent lost opportunities to create better systems for getting consumers what they want without all the waste.

But the good news is that there's a new reuse economy emerging for food service that has the potential to completely disrupt our current disposable food-service paradigm and replace it with something better.

## How reuse services for take-out and delivery work

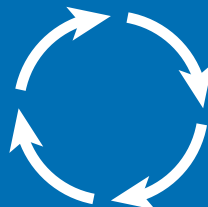
Reuse service provider washes and sanitizes containers and delivers them to the food service business



Restaurant serves customers in reusable containers for take-out/delivery



Customer gets meal to-go or delivered in reusable containers



Customer drops off containers or has them picked up

**Business benefits:** build brand loyalty; increase customer and employee satisfaction; generate customer behavior data; and create many new opportunities for entrepreneurs and investors to create and scale new reuse businesses

**Environmental Benefits:** less climate pollution, energy use, water consumption, resource extraction, waste generation, litter generation and plastic pollution

**Community benefits:** less waste (and associated costs), less litter (and cleanup costs), new jobs created in the reuse service economy

## The New Reuse Economy for Food Service

### REUSE FOR ON-SITE DINING

Whether you're dining at McDonald's or a trendy new fast casual eatery, disposables for on-site fast-food dining are the norm. This is because a prevailing misconception is that disposables are cheaper than reusables.

But this argument doesn't hold up in practice. Data from hundreds of case studies shows that making the switch from single-use to reuse for on-site dining always ends up saving money - 100% of the time. And that's after accounting for any capital costs for purchasing or leasing additional dishwasher capacity and any added labor costs.

### REUSE FOR TAKE-OUT AND DELIVERY

With take-out and delivery, it might seem like the only options are between disposable paper or plastic, but scores of new businesses are emerging to offer reuse B to B (to C) services and solutions to hack all this take-out packaging waste. Their services are easy to use, accessible, affordable, fun and convenient, and are revolutionizing how businesses do take-out by offering a circular system for collection, washing and sanitizing, and restocking reusable food-service ware. Food-service businesses can contract with these "reuse service-providers" for the amount and types of reusable to-go ware they desire.

## Food service by the numbers:

### TODAY'S "ONE-WAY, THROW-AWAY" ECONOMY:

- ➔ Nearly 1 trillion individual pieces of disposable foodware and packaging used by US restaurants and food service businesses. This breaks down as 21% for on-site dining and 79% for take-out and delivery.<sup>1</sup>
- ➔ \$24 billion spent by restaurants and food-service businesses on disposables each year.<sup>2</sup>

- ➔ Nearly 9 million tons equals the total weight of all the disposables used - equivalent to the weight of 25 Empire State Buildings.<sup>3</sup>
- ➔ \$6 billion spent by businesses and city governments on solid waste management costs attributable to disposable food packaging.<sup>4</sup>
- ➔ Roughly 20 billion pieces of litter are from disposable food-service packaging.<sup>5</sup>

### TOMORROW'S NEW REUSE ECONOMY:

- ➔ 86% of disposables avoided through 100% of on-site dining being disposable-free and new reuse services for take-out and delivery expanded to all US cities and urban areas.<sup>6</sup>
- ➔ 841 million disposable food packaging items avoided meaning that 7.5 million tons of materials would be averted annually.
- ➔ \$5 billion saved by food service businesses from no longer procuring disposables for on-site dining.
- ➔ \$5.1 billion saved by businesses and city governments on solid waste management costs attributable to disposable food packaging.
- ➔ 17 billion pieces of litter prevented through new reuse systems. The reusable products (cups, containers, cutlery, bags, etc) have value - like a deposit, or a charge if not returned - that ensures these products make their way back into the system.
- ➔ 193,000 jobs created in the new reuse economy for food service. These are community-based systems. They create infrastructure and jobs in the community that cannot be outsourced. And they keep money in the community instead of shipping it out to where the disposable packaging gets manufactured or where the materials to make disposables get mined from the planet.<sup>7</sup> ♦

## Today's "one-way throw-away" food service model

**High climate and energy impacts**, water use and natural resource extraction.

Nearly **1 trillion disposable food-service packaging items**, which equals **9 million tons**.

**\$6 billion** spent by businesses and communities on solid waste costs from disposables

Single-use foodware and packaging suppliers

**\$24 billion** spent by restaurants on disposables

Recycling facility

Compost facility

**20 billion pieces of litter** from food-service disposables

## Tomorrow's new reuse economy for food service

**86% of disposables avoided** - reducing climate and energy impacts, water use and natural resource extraction.

**193,000 jobs created** in new reuse economy. Jobs are created regionally in collection, washing, logistics, delivery, etc.

**841 million disposable food packaging items avoided** and **7.5 million tons** of materials averted annually.

Reuse service providers

**\$5 billion** saved by food service businesses from no longer procuring disposables for on-site dining.

**\$5.1 billion** saved by businesses and communities from avoided solid waste costs from no longer using disposables

**17 billion pieces of litter prevented** through new reuse systems

## Endnotes

**1** Rich Grousset, Senior Vice President, Re:Dish- based on calculations using data from "Overbrook Foundation: The Dirty Truth About Disposable Foodware" and The Freedonia Group (<https://www.freedoniagroup.com/Food-Service-Single-Use.html>)

**2** Rich Grousset, Senior Vice President, Re:Dish – based on the Freedonia Group (<https://www.freedoniagroup.com/Food-Service-Single-Use.html>)

**3** Rich Grousset, Senior Vice President, Re:Dish – updated calculations used in "Overbrook Foundation: The Dirty Truth About Disposable Foodware," but updated to reflect increased product pricing (based on growth rates provided by the Freedonia Group report) and the \$24 billion in sales projected by Freedonia Group.

**4** Rich Grousset, Senior Vice President, Re:Dish – Based on the following: "In the U.S., about \$200 billion a year is spent on solid waste management and lost energy resources from disposing trash, according to Dancy." <https://www.latimes.com/world/global-development/la-fg-global-trash-20160422-20160421-snap-htmlstory.html>. Used mass of total waste in U.S. from EPA and total mass of single-use products (nearly 9 million tons) to calculate fraction of total waste represented by disposables. Then applied that fraction to \$200 billion.

**5** 2% of waste generated in high-income countries such as the United States estimated to end up as litter, according to Law, K.L., Star, S., Siegler, T.R., Jambeck, J.R., Nicholas (2020) "The United States' contribution of plastic waste to land and ocean," *Science Advances*, 6/44

**6** Rich Grousset, Senior Vice President, Re:Dish. Assumption is that take-out and delivery in urban areas switches to reusable. Urban population is 82.46% of total. Combined 100% of onsite and 82.46% of take-out results in 86% conversion to reuse.

**7** Rich Grousset, Senior Vice President, Re:Dish