

CASE STUDY: Ballast Coffee



BUSINESS PROFILE

Name:
Ballast Coffee

Locations:
San Francisco, CA

On-site Dining:
30

Take-out:
Yes, 60-65%

Warewashing:
Mechanized dishwasher

Employees:
5

Packaging Practices prior to ReThink Disposable:

- Three sizes of polylactic acid (PLA) plastic containers for grab-and-go snacks (24-ounce for salads, 16-ounce for overnight oats, and 9-ounce for chia pudding and yogurt cups)
- Single-use forks, spoons, and knives

Recommendations Implemented:

- Replaced three varieties of PLA containers with returnable wide-mouth glass canning jars with lids (32-ounce, 16-ounce, and 8-ounce)
- Replaced single-use utensils with stainless steel flatware
- Placed signage next to napkins encouraging customers to “take only what they need”



Nestled in San Francisco’s West Portal neighborhood, Ballast Coffee is known to be the only café serving Barako coffee in the city of San Francisco. Grown only in the Philippines and small parts of Malaysia and Vietnam, coffee beans are shipped green to the café and are roasted locally. Café owner Paolo Araneta, every bit as bold as the Barako coffee he serves, deployed a new reusable jar system for Ballast’s daily grab-and-go treats and eliminated single-use disposable containers.* Jar deposits are refunded upon return of the jar, or can be applied to the next purchase. After two months of implementation, staff reported a return rate of 75% and didn’t need to restock their jar supply.

By offering returnable jars and replacing single-use utensils with stainless steel ones, Ballast Coffee eliminates the use of **12,369 pieces** of single-use food packaging, reduces their trash generation by **245 pounds**, and after an initial investment of **\$254** for reusable foodware, earns an ongoing net cost savings of nearly **\$1,263** annually.

“Reusables [are] the only way small businesses like Ballast should move forward. We all need to do our part in contributing to a sustainable future. Small things add up fast. If we all do our part, what a difference we all can make.”

— Paolo Araneta,
Founder and Chief Caffeine Officer



Above left: Single-use utensils were replaced with stainless steel flatware. Above right: Signage next to napkins encourages customers to “take only what they need.”

Before and After: Ballast Coffee replaced plastic take-out containers (left) with reusable glass jars (right).

*In March 2020, the reusable jar system was temporarily put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but Araneta plans on reinstating the jars in the coming months.

Results:

| Disposable Product Replaced or Minimized | Recommendation Implemented | Percent Disposable Reduction | Annual Quantity of Disposable Product Reduced | Payback Period (months) | Annual NET Cost Savings After Payback Period (\$) | Annual Waste Reduction (lbs.) |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| PLA 24 oz salad container | Replace with returnable mason jar | 100% | 608 | 4.3 | \$130 | 21 |
| PLA salad container lid | Eliminate | 100% | 608 | 0.0 | \$96 | 15 |
| PLA 9 oz chia and yogurt cup | Replace with returnable mason jar | 100% | 304 | 12.0 | \$33 | 4 |
| PLA 9 oz chia & yogurt cup lid | Eliminate | 100% | 304 | 0.0 | \$14 | 2 |
| PLA 16 oz cold cup | Replace with returnable mason jar | 100% | 6,083 | 0.7 | \$710 | 159 |
| PLA 16 oz cold cup lid | Eliminate | 100% | 1,217 | 0.0 | \$52 | 6 |
| Single-use fork | Replace with stainless steel fork | 89% | 1,081 | 8.2 | \$76 | 12 |
| Single-use spoon | Replace with stainless steel spoon | 89% | 1,081 | 6.7 | \$76 | 12 |
| Single-use knife | Replace with stainless steel knife | 89% | 1,081 | 6.7 | \$76 | 13 |
| TOTALS: | | | 12,369 pieces | 4.3 months | \$1,263 | 245 lbs. |

THE BOTTOM LINE

- \$1,263 in total annual net cost savings
- 12,369 disposable items reduced per year
- 245 lbs. of annual waste reduction
- 4.3-month payback period

*Net Cost Impact considers any upfront and ongoing costs associated with the purchase and care of reusable items and capital improvements needed to carry out ReThink Disposable's recommendations. Net cost savings are based on avoided disposable foodware purchases. Payback period is a function of the differential cost of foodware, set up costs, and number of sales.

ReThink Disposable is a program of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund conducted in partnership with local businesses and government agencies. Generous support is provided by a changing list of public and private funders. To learn more about the program, its partners, and funders, visit: www.rethinkdisposable.org.



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