

CASE STUDY

TACO TIME EMBRACES SEATTLE WASTE ORDINANCE BY REDEFINING QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

100% Compostable Serviceware Allowed A Simple Sorting System

SITUATION

Since the 1960s, Taco Time Northwest's 75 stores have grown to become an iconic restaurant chain known for serving delicious, healthy and freshly prepared food for both "dine in" and "take out" customers. With its focus on quality, local sourcing and sustainability, Taco Time is redefining the quick serve restaurant (QSR) industry.

When the City of Seattle passed an ordinance in 2010 that required compostable and recyclable single use food service items in dine-in food service operations, Taco Time willingly complied, and followed the standard 3 bin COMPOST/RECYCLE/TRASH sorting system. After discovering that all it took was one person in a hurry placing something in the wrong bin, and 90% of the materials end up as trash, they worked together to solve the sorting challenge and create a better system for the customer. Acknowledging that the intent of Seattle's ordinance was to minimize waste to the landfill, Taco Time set out to redesign the model around success, and a single bin "food and compostables" collection system was added to the front of the house.

SOLUTION

Taco Time enlisted the expertise from The City of Seattle, Cedar Grove Composting, Service Paper and Gravity Design for implementing system changes, identifying effective cost competitive compostable food serviceware products, and assistance with the design and development of new collection units. Key to the success of the restaurant chain's compost program was the addition of fully compostable food serviceware. Made from renewable resources, low-carbon-footprint Ingeo-based hot cups, cold cups and lids from International Paper, portion cups and lids from Pactiv, and cutlery and straws from WNA were introduced at one initial location to test various models for the new "compost only" system. Signage was key in engaging and educating customers, and collection areas were staffed throughout the stores for a period of time to acquire feedback and insights for the subsequent program implementation. Once best practices were determined, the program was rolled out to 57 restaurants with access to compost collection.

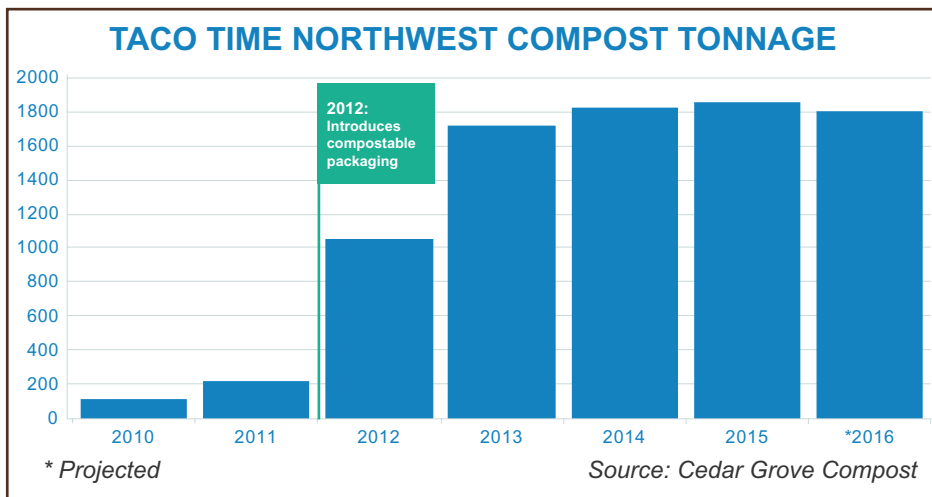


STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Create a simple sorting system for customers
- Minimize cross contamination in compost and recycling streams
- Divert more food scraps to the compost container

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- Gravity Creative
- Cedar Grove Composting, Inc.
- Cedar Grove Organics Recycling, LLC
- International Paper ecotainer®
- Pactiv EarthChoice®
- Seattle Public Utilities
- Service Paper Company
- WNA



CASE STUDY

continued

“Switching to all-compostable food serviceware provides our guests the opportunity to support the environment and their communities, while recognizing the leadership efforts of a local brand they know and trust.”

– Wes Benson, Franchise Affairs and Sustainability Manager, Taco Time Northwest



RESULTS

Prior to introducing compostable serviceware and going with the single bin system, Taco Time was diverting roughly 30% of their total waste volume to recycling. That number has more than doubled, and today 70%-75% of their waste is diverted from landfill through composting and recycling and other system enhancements such as converting used cooking oil to biodiesel. Other positive impacts include:

- Increased brand recognition with the expansion of shared community values, ultimately attracting new customers and increasing sales 47% between 2010 and 2015.
- Single bin solution requires minimal customer and employee training, ultimately reducing labor and associated collection and disposal costs.
- From 2012-2015, higher store operating costs resulted in a 6.7% retail price increase that was absorbed by growing customer base, while reduced disposal costs resulted in a net cost increase of only 0.2% after full implementation of program.
- Ongoing positive PR continues to highlight Taco Time as a national innovative leader.



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