

# Institutional Case Study: University of San Francisco's Market Café

## **BUSINESS PROFILE:**

**CAFÉ PILOT:**  
Market Café

**PROJECT TIMELINE:**  
February 2016–May 2017

**LOCATION:**  
2130 Fulton Street  
San Francisco, CA 94117

**STUDENT POPULATION:**  
11,018 (Fall 2016)

**AVG. TRANSACTIONS PER DAY:**  
5,000

**FOOD VENDOR:**  
Bon Appétit  
Management Company

**FOOD SERVICES:**  
Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Snacks

**DAYS OPEN PER YEAR:**  
335

**WARE WASHER:**  
Yes

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Bon Appétit Management Company plans to implement the ReThink Disposable program campus-wide at the University of San Francisco, after a successful pilot program at its Market Café saved more than \$150,000 in disposable foodware costs by eliminating more than two million items with no additional labor cost. The cafe is the hub of campus eating, and is open from 7am-9pm throughout the 335-day school year. It conducts an average of 5,000 transactions per day, with the bulk of service during the lunch rush from 11am-1pm. At the café, Bon Appétit is committed to sourcing local, fresh ingredients free from animal cruelty and antibiotics, and the company also procures sustainably grown produce from suppliers who are supportive of workers' rights.

# The University of San Francisco saved more than \$150,000 in disposable foodware costs each year by eliminating more than 2 million packaging items with a ReThink Disposable pilot program.

## Annual Packaging Impacts prior to Rethink Disposable

- 6,464,304 disposable food ware items purchased
- \$340,208 in disposable food ware cost
- 106,953 pounds of waste requiring sorting, hauling, and processing
- 44.77 metric tons of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions generated

Market Café had the operation and infrastructure to support washing reusables, but dining in the Café on all disposable packaging was the norm because there were very limited reusable options available. The few reusables that were available were not promoted or incentivized, Bon Appétit staff did not ask if the meal was “for here” or “to-go” when serving meals and defaulted to placing meals at made-to-order stations on disposable packaging, and campus dining waste reduction programs were focused on diverting compostable and recyclable materials away from landfill. As such, Clean Water Fund observed that over 90 percent of students dined inside the Café on single-use disposables.

## Recommendations Implemented

- Replaced disposable 9 oz cups with a reusable cup for the water stations
- Replaced two sizes of disposable salad bowls and lids with reusable bowls
- Reduced disposable cutlery and increased the availability and prioritized reusable forks, knives, and spoons
- Implemented bulk dispensers for sweeteners, salt and pepper, and unwrapped straws and toothpicks
- Minimized napkin use by removing stacks of napkins from each table and placed all napkins in two central locations
- Introduced a charge of \$0.25 on disposables to incentivize dining in on reusable food ware
- Bon Appétit staff defaulted to reusable food ware at stations where food is made-to-order.

*BEFORE:*  
Students dined in on disposable food ware with disposable cutlery. →



← *AFTER:* Students dine in on a reusable plate with stainless steel utensils.

Bon Appétit implemented the ReThink Disposable source reduction recommendations during a three month pilot at the Market Café from February 2017 to April 2017. Bon Appétit selected products that matched the Café’s style and purchased the new reusable food ware and supplies like napkin and cutlery station carts needed to support changing the operation to default to reusables. Bon Appétit took the lead and designed signage to place around Market Café to inform students about the changes, reorganized the cashier

station to incorporate the new reusable cups, salad bowls, and cutlery, and trained cashiers to default to reusable options for self serve stations where customers are served food. Bon Appétit reported two cost impacts to the changing operation: \$5,241 one-time initial set up cost to purchase new reusable food ware items and supplies, and \$27,297 in annual ongoing cost to sustain the operation to cover additional washing supplies, labor, and replacement of broken, lost, or damaged food ware.



**“We’re a large operation, and the details can sometimes get lost. But the knowledgeable and supportive ReThink team helped us significantly reduce our paper costs by more than \$150,000 each year...Those are numbers you can’t ignore, and we’re now looking to roll the program out across the campus.”**

Micah Cavolo, Executive Chef, Bon Appétit Management Company at USF

## Annual Packaging Impacts after Café B33’s ReThink Disposable Pilot

- **\$157,883 total annual savings** from avoided foodware purchases (reflects setup and ongoing cost)
- **26,926 pounds of waste prevented** from needing sorting, hauling, and processing every year
- **2,607,519 disposable items eliminated annually**
- **10.24 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions reduced (MTCO<sub>2</sub>)**
- No additional labor required
- Pilot changes made permanent
- Bon Appétit has plans to implement ReThink Disposable’s recommendations campus wide at all Bon Appétit USF campus locations



↑ New satellite stations for centralized napkins (instead of baskets on every table leading to overuse) and reusable flatware placed throughout Market Cafe.

## Annual Results:

ReThink Disposable Recommendation Implemented	Product Replaced or Minimized	Disposable Reduction (%)	Quantity of Disposable Product Reduced (#)	Payback Period (months)	Cost Savings After Payback Period (\$)	Waste Reduction (lbs.)	GHG Emissions Reduced (MTCO <sub>2</sub> )
Replaced disposable 9 oz cups with a reusable cup	9 oz Plastic Cups	100%	394,821	0.2	\$8,765.39	7,082 lbs	2.21
Implemented a straw dispenser	Wrapped Straws	51.2%	117,528	1.3	\$1,644.52	235 lbs	0.10
Replaced disposable salad bowls and lids with reusable bowls for dine-in	24 oz and 32 oz plastic bowl and lid combo	22.25%	35,671	0.08	\$10,077.22	2,582 lbs	0.16
Reduced availability of disposable cutlery and increased reusable flatware	Forks, knives, spoons	61.79%	809,538	0.53	\$67,753.14	13,738 lbs	3.62
Bon Appétit Staff defaulted to reusable food ware	8x8x3 to-go clamshells	(18.8 %)	(+79,020)	n/a	(+\$18,088.54)	(+6,717 lbs)	(+2.9)
Bon Appétit Staff defaulted to reusable food ware	6x6x3 to-go clamshells	32.7%	23,483	0.1	\$2,887.49	869	0.11
Removed baskets of napkins from every table	Napkins	33.7%	1,305,498	0	\$8,465.96	9,138 lbs	6.98
Charged students \$0.25 for disposable clamshell	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$76,378.05	n/a	n/a

## Pilot Project Challenges, Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Success

Working with a large and changing population of diverse, fast-moving students has its challenges. In this case, those included loss of silverware, coffee mugs, and reusable water cups during the first month of the pilot, which had to be repurchased. Better signage and staff communications could have helped to enforce more consistent student behavior. Most students correctly sorted food packaging waste from reusable food ware items, but some were observed leaving the café with the reusable items, which may be a result of the fact that the Café simply does not have enough seating for the busy lunch rush and students were eager to use reusables as part of the pilot project, and few students were observed disposing of the reusable items in waste bins. And surprisingly, although the overall use of disposable food ware items significantly decreased across ten different types of food service packaging during the pilot program, the use of 8x8x3 clamshells increased by 79,000 units projected for a year.

The ReThink Disposable program is, at its core, a program of behavior change to prevent over consumption of unnecessary disposable packaging. Without conscious participation from the campus community, changes at the institutional level will not be sustained. Conscious participation requires an active communications strategy that incorporates the ideas and feedback from the institution's stakeholders requiring coordination amongst Bon Appétit, USF Department of Sustainability, the student body, and the janitorial staff (facilities and maintenance). Additionally, based on student behavior and the high use of disposable clamshells for to-go orders, there is an opportunity to implement a reusable to-go container program on campus.

For the future success of this program it is recommended that USF and Bon Appétit:

**1. Develop a long-term communications strategy in coordination with the students and USF's Department of Sustainability** to market the program and provide ongoing positive reinforcement messaging to improve participation, reduce loss, and further support a reusable operation in Market Café. Communications can include: social media campaigns, promotion on campus website, emails, and newsletter, redesigned and more engaging and colorful signage,

*ReThink Disposable* is a **Clean Water Fund** program conducted in partnership with local businesses and government agencies. Generous support for the program is provided by a changing list of public and private funders. This project has been funded in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under assistance agreement X99738501 to Clean Water Fund. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.



← From disposable to reusable cups at the water stations. New signage is displayed to encourage students.

peer-to-peer outreach during the first weeks of each semester when students stand at Café waste sorting stations to educate about proper sorting, to instruct students on what to do with reusable food ware items, tabling in the Café and at campus events, and showcasing packaging waste art installations in the Café to highlight the problem.

**2. Conduct ongoing training and check-ins with Bon Appétit service staff** to reinforce defaulting to reusable food ware items. To support this, Bon Appétit should frequently check and restock reusable options at cashier and food stations.

**3. Develop and implement a deposit based reusable to-go container program.** Students would be able to take their food to go in a reusable container and then drop off the container at the Café or satellite locations strategically placed around campus. This may require a third party vendor to contract for these services due to the Market Café's limited space for washing and drying of what can be thousands of containers a week. This will significantly reduce the use of single use clamshells even further and will reduce product loss. A reusable to-go option to compliment the new culture of reuse in the Café will provide a holistic approach to packaging reduction in campus food service at USF.

**4. Expand on the reusable cups for the water stations to also include a reusable option for soda cups and coffee mugs** in Market Café, make straws available upon request only, and expand the range of the program to include all Bon Appétit sites on campus.

For more information  
about the program, visit  
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