

CASE STUDY: El Metate Restaurant

**ReThink
Disposable**
STOP WASTE BEFORE IT STARTS

BUSINESS PROFILE

Name: El Metate Restaurant

Business Type: Fast Casual Mexican Restaurant

Location: San Francisco, CA

On-site dining: 40 seats

Take-out: Yes

Ware washing: Installed after project completion

Employees: 14

El Metate is a Mexican Restaurant that conducts about 80 transactions per day, 40% of which are dine-in orders. Customers place orders at the cashier counter and the food is made to order. Customers receive their food from the order pick-up counter and dine-in customers sit in the dining room or at outside tables.



Trash, compost and recycling containers in the dining room were replaced with bus tub racks.

Packaging Practices prior to Rethink Disposable:

- ➔ Disposable cutlery was used for dine-in customers
- ➔ Two sizes of disposable sauce cups with lids were used at the salsa bar



Dine-in customers at El Metate were served meals on ceramic plates and bowls but were provided disposable cutlery and portion cups from a self-serve station. Fernando, the owner of El Metate, had initially

purchased reusable cutlery but never put it out due to a flu pandemic several years ago. In addition to being concerned about the safety of using reusable cutlery, he was also worried about potential loss of reusables mistakenly thrown in the trash by customers.

Recommendations Implemented:

- ➔ Replaced disposable cutlery for reusable cutlery for dine-in
- ➔ Replaced disposable sauce cups with reusable for dine-in

El Metate replaced dining room trash, compost, and recycling containers with bus tub racks. Customer bussing of tables prevents loss of reusable food service ware items like sauce cups and cutlery. Staff morale declined due to additional dishes needing to be washed, prompting the owner to purchase a new efficient dishwasher. The owner noticed an increase of dine-in customers due in part to the cashiers more diligently asking each customer if their order is for dine-in or take-out, in addition to the make-over of the dining room and the use of metal cutlery and ceramic sauce cups to improve the customer dining experience.



Metal cutlery improved the customer dining experience.



Disposable sauce cups were replaced with reusable ceramic ones.

Francisco Hernandez, owner: “No matter how you see it, the *Rethink Disposable* program is beneficial to everyone.”

Results:

Recommendation	Products Replaced or Minimized	% Disposable Reduction	Payback Period	Annual Savings <i>(after payback period)</i>	Annual Waste Reduction
Provide metal forks for dine-in	Plastic forks	64%	6 days	\$2,349	941 lbs.
Provide metal spoons for dine-in	Plastic spoons	5%	11.3 months	\$48	19 lbs.
Provide metal knives for dine in	Plastic knives	77%	9 days	\$2,109	1,014 lbs.
Provide reusable salsa cups for dine-in	Portion cups for salsa 2 oz	58%	5 days	\$3,270	1,308 lbs.
Provide reusable salsa cups for dine-in	Portion cups for salsa 3.25 oz	53%	1 month	\$1,181	369 lbs.
The owner purchased a new dishwasher after program completion; therefore the cost impact of the new dishwasher is not included in the results above.			TOTAL	\$8,957	3,651 lbs.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- 493,711 disposable items were reduced per year
- \$8,957 in annual savings after payback period
- 3,651 pounds of annual waste reduction
- Elevated dining experience resulted in more customers staying on-site to dine
- Less litter prone food packaging walking out the door
- Bus tubs and racks helped reduce product loss
- No additional labor required

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