



SUSTAINABILITY TRENDS: BIODEGRADABLE FOODSERVICE PACKAGING HERE TO STAY

By Dan Thor, BFC

The concerns about environmental impact have never been more prevalent. One of the biggest contributors to pollution is foodservice packaging. In 2021, the foodservice packaging industry was valued at over \$118 billion. A study in 2019 estimated that polystyrene foam represents 30% of all landfill space by volume and plastic waste represents 80% or more of the waste that accumulates on land, shoreline, ocean surfaces, and seabeds.

Foodservice waste items cause significant hazards to the environment and wildlife. While many of these disposable items are marked recyclable, most waste treatment centers reject them and place them in landfills where they sit unable to break down over time.

As environmental conservation continues to heat up, more states will follow the environmentally conscious trend led by European countries to keep harmful packaging from the local foodservice market. So far, 10 states have passed legislation banning or restricting plastic, foam, or polystyrene food packaging with several others having proposed legislation on the docket.

We have also seen greater investment in biodegradable foodservice packaging from a growing number of domestic and international suppliers over the past 12-24 months. These suppliers are making products from sustainable resources such as plant starch and wood composite that are fully compostable but made to the same durability and heat resistance as their plastic/Styrofoam predecessors. From cutlery to to-go boxes, there aren't many items that you are compostable and/or 100% recyclable alternative that would leave as little environmental impact as possible.

Besides setting a legal precedent, which will continue adoption in more states and regions, changing how we approach sustainability is not just a question for big food manufacturers, but all foodservice parties, especially the local level. High demand for sustainable packaging alternatives will lead to new packaging choices. Take Pizzeria da Ezio as an example. According

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SHOULD IT STAY OR SHOULD IT GO?

By Don Hughes, BFC

Recent news coverage shows an abundance of international events and its impact on raw materials; many of which are affecting the main ingredients that are used in restaurants today, both in quality and cost – oil, pasta, flour, grains, not to mention products used in agricultural industries.

Menu trends, menu costs, and the impact of ingredients weigh on the minds of local operators more and more as they impact overall customer satisfaction. It becomes more challenging when raw ingredient choices have to be made. That's when Operators must make the decision of should it stay, or should it go?

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MARKET UPDATE

Dairy	PRICE	LAST MONTH	DIFF
Cheese Blocks	\$2.015	\$1.633	\$0.382

The U.S. dairy market showed some strength (w/w) across most of the categories as milk production is seasonally decreasing. Production has also declined because of the declining milk production, helping move the cheese segment higher.

Beef	PRICE	LAST MONTH	DIFF
50% Trimmings	\$1.392	\$1.778	(\$0.386)

With the smaller harvest numbers over the past few weeks and months, live cattle pricing might pull back from recent highs.

Poultry	PRICE	LAST MONTH	DIFF
Whole Wings	\$1.189	\$1.147	\$0.042

Total poultry production is 23 million pounds this year through June, up 2.7 percent $\gamma\gamma$ (or 621,000 pounds). Recently announced poultry plant closures should have some effect on next year's production.

As of 8/18/23

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to Forbes, it is currently one of the most sustainable pizzerias in Italy. Pizzeria da Ezio has chosen to “reduce its environmental impact by going zero plastic and reducing food waste by feeding leftovers to livestock and purchasing ingredients from local farmers”.

Most food service operators are resistant to change to more environmentally friendly alternatives due to the perceived increase in costs and reluctance to pass those costs onto consumers. However, a study by MDPI found that 66% of responders would pay an additional \$0.40 per meal for plastic alternatives for both dine-in and take out which often far outweighs the cost difference of the actual product.

To change your own sustainable footprint, it would be helpful to formulate your own sustainability strategy. The exercise would require a true look at the waste that is produced because of your operation, and what is put to the public in the form of take out product.

Here are some suggestions in forming a strategy:

- Change the mindset of leadership – change is most effective from the top down.
- Look at every facet of the business for potential item switches and product alternatives on both inbound and outbound items.
- Start working with an environmentally conscious supplier.
- Choose options with the least impact to buy and sell.
- Investigate renewable energy options – eg. Solar.

Sustainability can also be a promotional tool. The base reason for the transition should always be a more sustainable business and healthy environment, but letting the public know of the changes that are being made and engaging with the community in environmental activities can help positive connotations and word of mouth endorsement.

A fundamental approach to life and business is to make continuous improvements. The same can be said for your road to sustainability towards making small changes on an ongoing basis to yield large end results. Curbing foodservice waste will be an ongoing issue and the biodegradable alternatives could be a welcome change to your business and the environment.



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*Source: Potato Track US YE Aug 2022

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SHOULD IT STAY OR SHOULD IT GO?

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Operators are finding themselves with more challenges and still provide quality products to their customers. Through the pandemic, many restaurateurs were challenged to keep up with quality finished products, many times using ingredients from new suppliers or brands, just to have something to sell. In most cases, product quality suffered but kept products available. As distribution lines reopened, operators saw regularly used items disappear from the distributor's offerings as suppliers rationalized SKUs for various reasons. Restaurant operators had to make decisions on whether to maintain their quality of offerings to customers or lower their food cost, sometimes offering a larger portion to maintain satisfaction.

As items and ingredients become more readily available, new item options are beginning to emerge. Many new items based on business needs during the pandemic are now becoming reality. Increased demand for further processed but not finished ingredients is becoming more widely acceptable to many operators. There are various products from made-from-scratch establishments created over the last few years.

Operators are looking into how updating an item or ingredient offering can help maintain those highly scrutinized menu costs; or upgrade the preparation process within their establishment. For example, moving away from the basic block cheese into a shred can save on labor; or finding a pasta that can be brought to al dente without cooking can also be a huge time saver. Even using a spice blend instead of individual spices can help create consistency in dishes. Remember to keep an open mind as offerings and products have changed. There are some exciting new possibilities in the marketplace.

Take advantage of the industry professionals in the area to help you and your business make decisions on when old processes or ingredients should stay or go.

After all, high quality food offerings, polite/professional service, best in class customer experience, and reasonably priced consistent menu options all contribute to return customers!



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