

CASE STUDY: Gus' Tacos Mexican Grill

**ReThink
Disposable**
STOP WASTE BEFORE IT STARTS

BUSINESS PROFILE

Name: Gus' Tacos Mexican Grill
Business Type: Fast Casual
Location: Los Angeles, CA
On-site dining: 30 seats
Take-out: Yes
Warewashing: Three-sink system
Employees: 3

Gus' Tacos Mexican Grill is a no-frills Mexican eatery that offers a wide range of authentic options made with fresh ingredients. It's located in Silver Lake and is famous for its array of salsas, particularly, it's seriously spicy "Super Hot Sauce." Dishes are made to order at the counter where meals are served on a reusable plate with disposable plastic utensils (fork, knife, spoon) and beverages served in a disposable plastic-lined paper cup with a straw. Napkins are available on each table in a napkin holder. Customers bus themselves, delivering the reusable plate to the top of a trash receptacle and the remaining single-use plastic items were tossed into the trashcan.

Packaging Practices prior to ReThink Disposable:

- ➔ Meals served on a reusable plate but with disposable plastic utensils
- ➔ Beverages served in a disposable plastic-lined paper cup
- ➔ Straws automatically handed out with all beverages

Recommendations Implemented:

- ➔ Replaced plastic utensils with reusable silverware for dine-in customers
- ➔ Replaced disposable 24-ounce cold cups with reusable cups for dine-in customers
- ➔ Individually wrapped straws are available by request only with signage next to the straws reinforcing this

Gus' Tacos
Mexican Grill

As a result of implementing **ReThink Disposable's** recommendations, Gus' Tacos Mexican Grill reduced their use of targeted disposable foodware items by an average of **45%** and is **preventing the use of 17,832 disposable items and 210 pounds of waste annually, while earning an ongoing cost savings each year of \$416.18** from the avoided foodware purchases. The owner purchased all the reusable foodware needed to implement the program for only \$168.

Despite an increase in on-site reusable foodware, staff time and labor cost were not impacted by the changing operation. **ReThink Disposable** implementations were easily integrated, and the owner is thrilled with patron feedback as well as financial savings. **ReThink Disposable** specialists also recommended that Gus consider further opportunities to reduce disposable packaging by implementing 32-ounce reusable cups, utilizing

a one-at-a-time napkin dispenser, removing disposables from patron facing to-go station to limit access, and removing disposable plastic condiment cups and lids from the self-serve salsa bar to promote salsa-to-plate and/or reusable lava rock bowls. Gus started with the changes that he thought would work best in his current operations and will consider these additional recommendations in the future.



BEFORE: Meals were served on a reusable plate with plastic utensils. Water and cold beverages were served in a plastic-lined paper cup.

AFTER: Meals are served on a reusable plate with reusable utensils. Beverages are served in a reusable cup.

Results:

| Disposable Product Replaced or Minimized | ReThink Disposable Recommendation Implemented | % Disposable Reduction | Payback Period (months) | Annual Quantity of Disposable Product Reduced (# of pieces) | Annual Net Cost Savings* (after payback period) | Annual Waste Reduction (lbs.) | |
|--|---|------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| 24-oz Plastic-Lined Paper Cold Cups | Implement reusable 24-oz tumbler | 10% | 8.5 | 608 | \$38.62 | 22 | |
| Plastic Forks | Implement reusable silverware | 40% | 3.6 | 4,867 | \$127.13 | 64 | |
| Plastic Spoons | Implement reusable silverware | 94% | 3.0 | 5,718 | \$151.83 | 83 | |
| Plastic Knives | Implement reusable silverware | 52% | 5.5 | 3,163 | \$77.74 | 35 | |
| Plastic Straws | Offer straws only upon request | 29% | 0 | 3,476 | \$20.86 | 6 | |
| | | | | TOTAL | 17,832 | \$416.18 | 210 lbs. |

*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.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- \$416.18 in annual net cost savings
- 17,832 disposable items reduced per year
- 210 pounds of annual waste reduction
- Implemented operational changes and completed *ReThink Disposable* certification within one month

Gus Estrada Sanchez, Owner: "To begin with, I thought it might be a bit of a hassle to participate in this program. But it really wasn't at all. It takes a couple minutes of your time to make a big difference in both your finances and the earth."



ReThink Disposable is a program of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund conducted in partnership with The Bay Foundation, 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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