



May 20, 2022

Re: IE30.17 Single-Use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy - Voluntary Measures Program Launch

Dear Chair McKelvie and Members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee,

We are writing on behalf of the University of Toronto Trash Team. The [U of T Trash Team](http://www.uofttrashteam.ca) is a science-based community outreach group whose goal is to increase waste literacy in our community while reducing plastic pollution in our ecosystems. We are writing to share the results of our research project, as we understand that Single-use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy isn't moving forward - with the voluntary phase yet to start and Stage 2 delayed.

Our research demonstrates a need for this policy to continue moving forward to both reduce plastic pollution in our waterways and to support local businesses. We ask that you either a) proceed with the next phase as planned or b) clearly communicate with the public regarding a new timeline to maintain momentum and critical research to ensure a successful program.

Plastic pollution is a critical issue in our society, including locally. Thousands of metric tonnes of plastic waste enter the Great Lakes annually, harming wildlife and contaminating our drinking water.

The U of T Trash Team has many local projects to combat plastic pollution. Today, we are writing you about our project [Ditching disposables: Single-use Foodware](#). For this study, we collaborate with Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA). The objectives of this project are to investigate the challenges and opportunities local businesses experience in reducing single-use foodware and switching to reusable alternatives. In phase I of this project, surveys and interviews were conducted with 12 small businesses from across Toronto including sit-down restaurants, quick-service restaurants, cafes, and a bakery.

Our results inform upstream solutions to plastic pollution and are relevant to the Waste Strategy in Toronto (particularly relevant to demonstrating the potential success of the Single-use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy). **We found that many Toronto food service businesses already consider the environment in their business decisions and are already taking steps to reduce single-use items.** This means that there is a demand for policies around single-use and takeaway items. Some restaurants already offer reusable options and noted that actions related to reducing single-use items can create benefits including cost savings and customer loyalty.

Based on our surveys it was also clear that restaurants and cafes in Toronto want, and will benefit from, more guidance and support to further reduce single-use foodware, including education campaigns to customers, information from the City on the safety of reusable foodware, and consistent municipal policies and programs. This suggests that policies will be more successful if they include a mechanism to inform businesses about the value of the program, health and safety guidelines, and some resources to help them make informed choices about sustainable options for foodware. Policies will also be more successful with an education campaign

directed at the public – i.e., their customers. Educational resources are critical, especially as the federal government moves away from some single-use items. We want to be sure substitutions are not regrettable. For more detail, please see the attached [summary](#) and [research report](#).

Thank you so much for your time. We look forward to sharing more about our work with you to inform critical policies to reduce single-use foodware.

Kind regards,

Dr. Rafaela F. Gutierrez
Lead of Social Science and Educational Programs

Dr. Chelsea M Rochman
Assistant Professor in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
Director of Operations for the U of T Trash Team

Food service businesses in Toronto are willing to change their practices around single-use and reusable foodware

March 2022



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Introduction

Forthcoming regulations from federal and municipal governments to restrict and reduce single-use foodware present an important opportunity to address plastic pollution and achieve waste reduction and climate goals. As these regulations will impact local food service businesses in Toronto, data and insights from local businesses are important to shape policies, including Toronto's Single-Use Reduction Strategy.

The University of Toronto Trash Team and the Toronto Environmental Alliance conducted a study to understand the experiences of local business in reducing single-use foodware and switching to reusable alternatives. Through surveys and interviews, this research study gathered insights from local businesses about their challenges and opportunities, opinions on forthcoming regulations, and the support businesses need.



Background

In 2020, an estimated 24 - 35 million Metric Tonnes of plastic waste entered global aquatic ecosystems (Borrelle et al., 2020). In the Great Lakes specifically, an estimated 10,000 tonnes of plastic waste enter each year (Hoffman and Hittinger, 2017). Increases in littered plastic waste are due to a combination of increased production of plastic, increased consumption of single-use plastic items, and poor waste management (Borrelle et al. 2020). In Canada, single-use packaging accounts for almost 50% of the plastic waste generated (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2020). In response, national and local governments have committed to reducing plastic waste and pollution, and are advancing policies that focus on reducing single-use foodware and takeout items. The federal government's Canada-wide Strategy on Zero Plastic Waste includes a roadmap to address single-use plastics, and a ban on six single-use plastic items is expected by the end of 2022 (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2021).^{1 2}

The City of Toronto, in line with its Long-Term Waste Management Strategy's target of 70% diversion and circular economy goal, has been developing a Single-Use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy since 2018 to address non-recyclable single-use items made of plastic and other materials (City of Toronto, 2019).

In June 2021, Toronto's City Council approved the first voluntary phase of the Single-Use Reduction Strategy

encouraging businesses to voluntarily implement actions to reduce single-use items. As of the time of publication, the City is preparing for Phase 2 of the Single-Use Reduction Strategy, to be considered by City Council in June 2022, which will include mandatory measures to restrict certain single-use items. Proposed regulations would require that food service establishments 'Ask First' before providing single-use accessories such as utensils, straws, and stirrers as well as condiments, napkins, cup sleeves. Regulations would also require businesses to charge mandatory fees for single-use hot and cold drink cups, and single-use and reusable shopping bags (City of Toronto, 2022).³

In anticipation of policy changes, and to increase sustainability, some food service businesses in Toronto have already taken steps to reduce their single-use materials both for on-site and takeout food and drink. This includes providing reusable alternatives for takeout orders by allowing customers to 'Bring Your Own' (BYO) cup or container, or by providing services where customers can borrow or rent reusable takeout foodware. However, to meet the goals of the City of Toronto's Long-Term Waste Management Strategy, many more businesses must reduce their use of single-use foodware items. As such, it is critical that policies aimed at reducing single-use foodware are successful.

To help inform City decision-makers regarding the needs of businesses to reduce single-use foodware, the University of Toronto Trash Team and the Toronto Environmental Alliance, a

non-profit environmental organization, conducted a study to identify the challenges and opportunities associated with accepting or offering reusable options for takeout food and drink in local businesses in Toronto. Our study: 1) assessed the level of participation in reducing single-use foodware items in local businesses within Toronto; and 2) assessed the challenges and opportunities that local businesses experience with offering reusable takeout options. **Our findings summarize the potential for success in increasing and sustaining the use of reusable takeout options across Toronto to reduce single-use waste and plastic pollution.**



Methods

Food service businesses which sell ready-to-eat food (i.e., cafes, dine-in and takeout restaurants) were the focus of the investigation. Ethical approval for interviews was obtained from the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board (REB) and written informed consent was obtained from all subjects before the study.

The research included two methods for collecting data from businesses:

a) Online surveys. An online survey with closed and open-ended questions was sent to businesses through different online channels. We aimed to connect through community groups, including: Toronto's Reduces Groups Network, 80 Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), Zero Waste Toronto, and the Toronto Environmental Alliance. We also conducted outreach via social media (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook). Finally, we directly contacted 120 businesses from across the city identified through geo-targeted searches on Google Maps. The purpose of this survey was to determine if and how businesses were participating in activities to reduce single-use items, the types of activities, their motivations, and what challenges they faced. This survey also served to recruit business managers willing to participate in an interview (detailed below).

b) Interviews. From the surveys, businesses were identified and categorized based on their current level of participation in activities to reduce

single-use foodware items. Categories were as follows: 1) actively participating; 2) considering/planning to participate; 3) not considering participating yet and/or actively refusing to participate. Twelve businesses agreed to be interviewed. A semi-structured questionnaire was conducted over the phone or video call. Each interview lasted between 20 and 40 minutes, and questions related to the following topics: single-use and reusable foodware items used, motivations, and challenges or assistance needs to reduce single-use foodware. All interviews were conducted between August and October of 2021. NVivo-12 was used to organize and synthesize data.

It is important to note that we observed the effects of the pandemic due to the timing of our study. Precautionary COVID-19 restrictions implemented by public health authorities varied during the multiple waves of the pandemic. At multiple points between March 2020 and the survey period in Fall 2021, the Ontario government mandated food service businesses close all in-person services, allowing only contactless delivery and takeout. While not required by public health authorities, a number of restaurants and major chains suspended the use of reusable cups and foodware for onsite consumption in quick-service restaurants and stopped accepting customer-supplied reusable cups and containers. Both of these actions (i.e., increase in takeout and limiting reusables) caused a surge in consumption of single-use foodware (Molloy et. al, 2022). During the period of this study (August - October 2021), restaurants had reopened for onsite dining, but takeout was still a large

part of their business. Many, though not all, chains and individual restaurants restarted their acceptance of customer-supplied cups, containers and bags. This study was conducted during a period after restaurants had reopened for indoor dining and were preparing for new public health requirements. This affected participation in the survey and interviews, as businesses were focused on work related to reopening and felt they didn't have time to participate. Furthermore, because participation in this research was voluntary, businesses that already take actions to prevent or reduce the amount of single-use foodware items may be over-represented.

Results and Discussion

Overall, 33 Toronto businesses completed the surveys and 12 agreed to an interview. Interviews were conducted with business owners or managers. All results and discussions below are based on the 12 businesses that participated in both the online survey and interview.

Interviewees represented a range of food service models, including high-end sit-down restaurants, casual restaurants/bars, cafes with or without seating⁴, and a bakery.

These businesses ranged from providing 100% takeout service (4 businesses), to 50 to 70% takeout (2 businesses), to just under 50% takeout (3 businesses), to very

little takeout (e.g., when customers bring leftovers home: 3 businesses).

Takeout was the primary reason for the consumption of single-use foodware items, including taking leftovers home. Ten of the 12 interviewed businesses said that the amount of single-use foodware increased during COVID-19, due to an increase in takeout during mandated closures, and perceptions around the safety of reusables. Below, we summarize our key findings that can inform future programs and policies.

3.1. Businesses are already taking steps to reduce single-use foodware items

The majority of the interviewed businesses, 11 of the 12, reported that

Have you taken any of the following steps to prevent waste or reduce the amount of single-use foodware you give out?

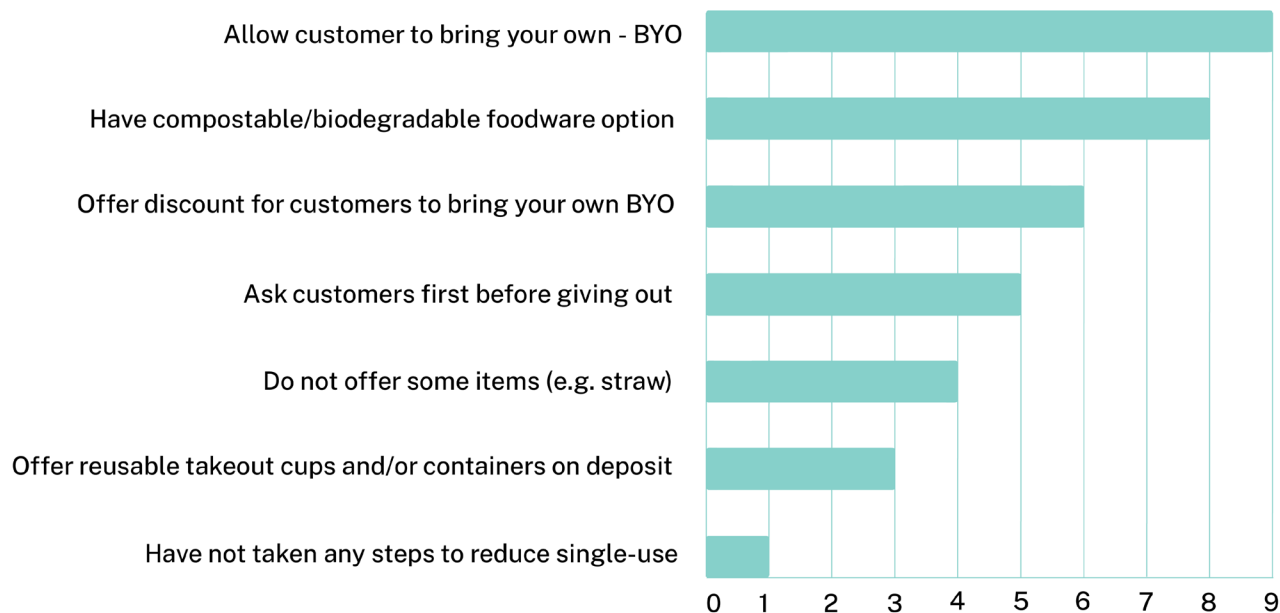


Figure 1. Steps taken by businesses in Toronto to prevent waste or reduce the amount of single-use foodware.

they have already taken actions to reduce single-use foodware items. Actions range from not offering and/or reducing the amount of single-use foodware provided, to shifting away from plastic-based materials, and providing reusable alternatives to single-use.

Five out of 12 businesses reported they usually ask customers if they want single-use foodware before giving them out; eight reported that they use compostable foodware; nine out of 12 businesses confirmed their customers are allowed to bring their own (BYO) container/mug for takeout and six of those provide a discount for customers who do so. Three businesses reported that they offer reusable takeout cups and containers for customers to borrow or rent (figure 1).

Reusable Takeout Foodware Services

While some businesses allow customers to bring-their-own reusable containers for takeout food or drink, a growing number of businesses in Toronto and around the world offer reusable foodware for customers to borrow or rent. After use, the foodware is returned, either to the same location or another participating restaurant or drop-off location.

Restaurants may offer this directly or subscribe to an external reusable takeout service that is offered in more than one restaurant. Some require the customer to join a free or paid subscription for the service and others require a refundable deposit at point of sale.

Examples in Toronto include: Muuse and Reego for hot drink cups, Suppli, Inwit and Ozzi for food containers.⁵

We asked participants what they consider when making purchasing decisions for single-use foodware for takeout. The top answer was “good for the environment”, with 10 out of 12 businesses agreeing (Figure 2). Other top concerns include food temperature, food presentation, public health concerns, customer opinion and cost (Figure 2).

“First and foremost, it’s about the environment, the extent to which our customers are interested in contributing to that respect. So, it is part of our brand to do things that are good for the environment”. – Restaurant owner, on choosing foodware.

What do you consider when choosing foodware for your business?

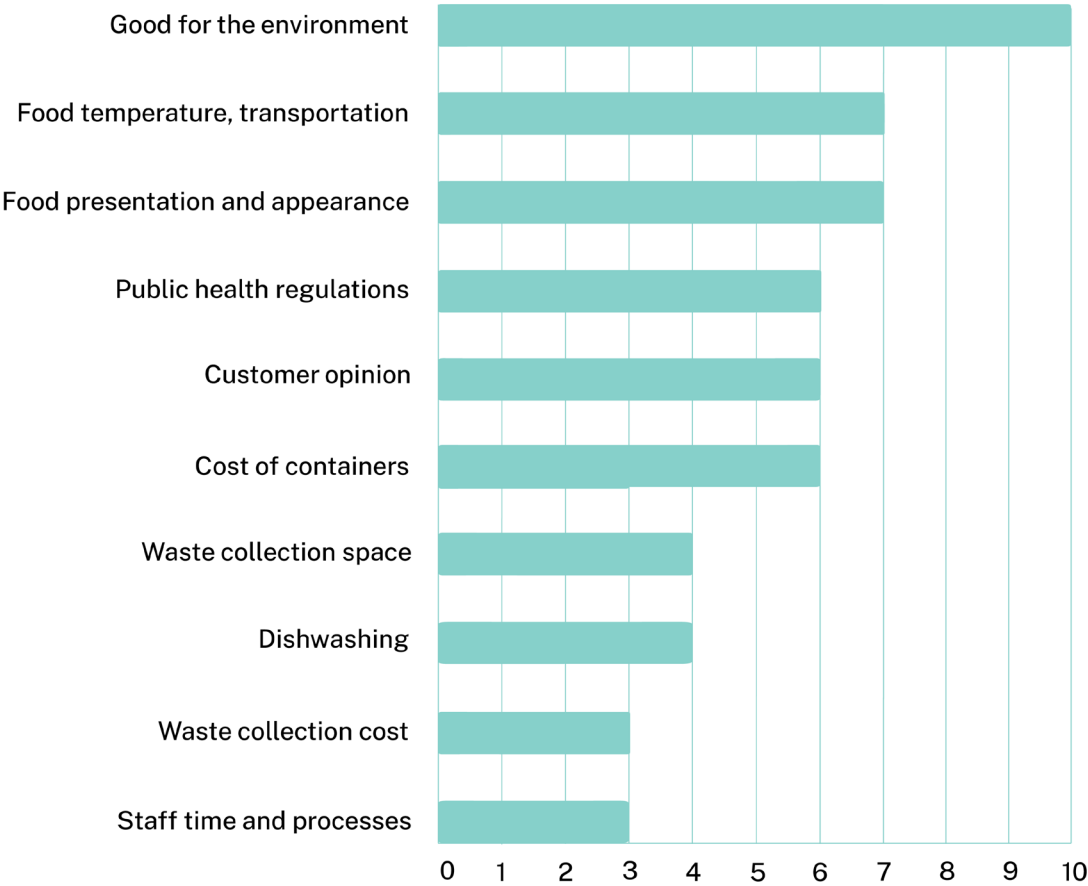


Figure 2. What businesses considered when choosing foodware.

3.2. Businesses are choosing more expensive foodware labelled ‘compostable’, believing that it is better for the environment

Eight of the 12 interviewed businesses purchase bioplastic and/or compostable options for some or all of their single-use foodware items (including containers, cups, straws and utensils) because they believe that it is better for the environment. However, the City of Toronto discourages ‘compostable’ and bioplastics single-use foodware and does not accept them in the municipal organics program, nor in the recycling program (see sidebar).

Three of the businesses that use compostable plastic foodware reported they were aware that the City does not accept compostable foodware in the municipal Green Bin and they need to be placed in the garbage bin, but the others did not mention this. Of these, one had stopped purchasing compostable plastic, one said they were looking for alternatives, and one said the City should change its system.

As ‘compostable’ options are more expensive than other single-use items, this suggests that the businesses interviewed are willing to pay higher costs to meet environmental goals and customer expectations. However, clearer education and information about compostable and bioplastic foodware is needed to ensure that businesses and customers understand the environmental impact and the fact that it does not belong in the organics or recycling bins.

Compostable foodware

Compostable foodware refers to single-use items labelled and marketed as ‘compostable’ by a manufacturer and includes products made of bioplastics as well as paperboard sometimes lined with bioplastics.

‘Bioplastic’ refers to a variety of plastic materials including: bio-based plastic that is made of plant and biological materials instead of petroleum; biodegradable plastics designed to break down into smaller pieces in the environment; and compostable plastic designed to break down in specific industrial composting facilities leaving no toxic end products (5 Gyres BAN List, 2017).

Bioplastics have been shown to have the same or similar harmful impacts in the environment as plastic when not disposed of properly (National Geographic, 2018), as well as a significant upstream resource and energy footprint.

In Toronto’s municipal waste system, all compostable and bioplastics belong in the garbage bin: bioplastics are not accepted in the recycling stream due to the lowered recycling quality and are considered contamination; compostable foodware will not break down in Toronto’s organics processing in anaerobic digesters.

3.3. Businesses are offering reusable takeout options

We assessed the current activities and willingness to offer reusable foodware options for takeout food and drink to replace single-use foodware items. This includes allowing customers to bring their own reusable cups or containers (Bring-Your-Own or BYO) or offering reusable takeout services with cups and containers that customers can borrow and return.

As noted above, **nine of the 12 businesses reported that they allow customers to bring their own (BYO) reusable cups and containers when ordering takeout**, or when taking leftovers home. Six of the businesses interviewed offer a discount for BYO that ranges from 10 to 50 cents. Customer participation is generally low with most businesses estimating that less than 10% of customers BYO, and some estimating less than 1%.

“As we are moving away from the pandemic, the number is slowly increasing. Right now, it is less than 10%.”
– Cafe owner, on the number of customers who bring their own cups.

However, some businesses had higher BYO participation: cafes had had the highest rate of customers actively participating, with one reporting 30% of customers BYO, and another stating that 60% BYO now (this business reported that 90% of customers BYO before the pandemic). These two coffee shops offered the highest discounts - 40 cents and 50 cents - and had the most visible and active promotion of the discount (e.g.

signs, staff ask customers at point of sale).

Three of the interviewed cafes offer reusable takeout services for customers to borrow and return cups. Three other businesses (2 restaurants and 1 cafe) reported that they are interested in, or considering reusable takeout services in the future. One other restaurant reported previously allowing customers to borrow reusable dishes without a deposit, but currently does not, citing the difficulty in getting the dishes back.

Based on our interviews, cafes have the highest customer participation in BYO reusable or using a reusable takeout foodware service. This suggests that cafes may face less barriers to shift to reusables, and the experiences in cafes can be shared as lessons for other restaurant types.

3.4. Businesses experience benefits and face challenges to providing reusable takeout options

When asked about their experience allowing customers to bring their own reusables or offering reusable takeout foodware services, businesses noted a number of benefits and challenges. Reducing single-use foodware items saves businesses money in the cost of items, but also the cost to order, stock and store the foodware. A few businesses noted that offering reusables was good for customer loyalty and addressing customer concerns about the environment.

In terms of challenges to expanding BYO,

a top priority raised by businesses is the need to shift customer behaviour so that they carry their cups and containers. A few suggested that the City could do more to promote and educate the public on the safety of reusable containers. Businesses noted that public health guidance for businesses on how to safely manage reusables, considering the different setups of many restaurants, would also be helpful. For reusable takeout foodware services provided in-store, there was strong support from multiple businesses for standardizing reusable cup and container sizes, and even a standardized city-wide reusable takeout foodware program.

This would reduce the cost and burden for individual businesses in terms of investment, logistics for processes and storage, and it would allow customers to pick up and drop off reusable foodware at many different restaurants.

“I think it’s possible, but I think it would have to be standardized throughout the city. So just for efficiency’s sake, that way you know, systems of storage for these things, cleaning the things, stacking them, putting them somewhere, you know it would be interchangeable.” – Restaurant manager, on reusable takeout foodware.



3.5. Businesses need guidance and support to successfully reduce single-use foodware and shift to reusable options

We asked businesses what they needed in order to reduce single-use foodware. The most common answer was that they needed to better understand public health guidelines on safely managing reusables (e.g. BYO containers) and that they would benefit from help to identify better options (e.g. a list of suppliers for recyclable, compostable or reusable items) (Figure 3).

Business managers noted that guidance and a list of suppliers would save time due to the difficulty of sourcing the best options. This would benefit decision-making by companies that want to reduce single-use foodware in their establishment but don't know where to start.

“You have to buy from many suppliers, more than 20 of them, because we are always trying to find the best [material] for the environment.” – Cafe owner, on choosing foodware.

What would help you to reduce single-use foodware and choose reusable items in your business?

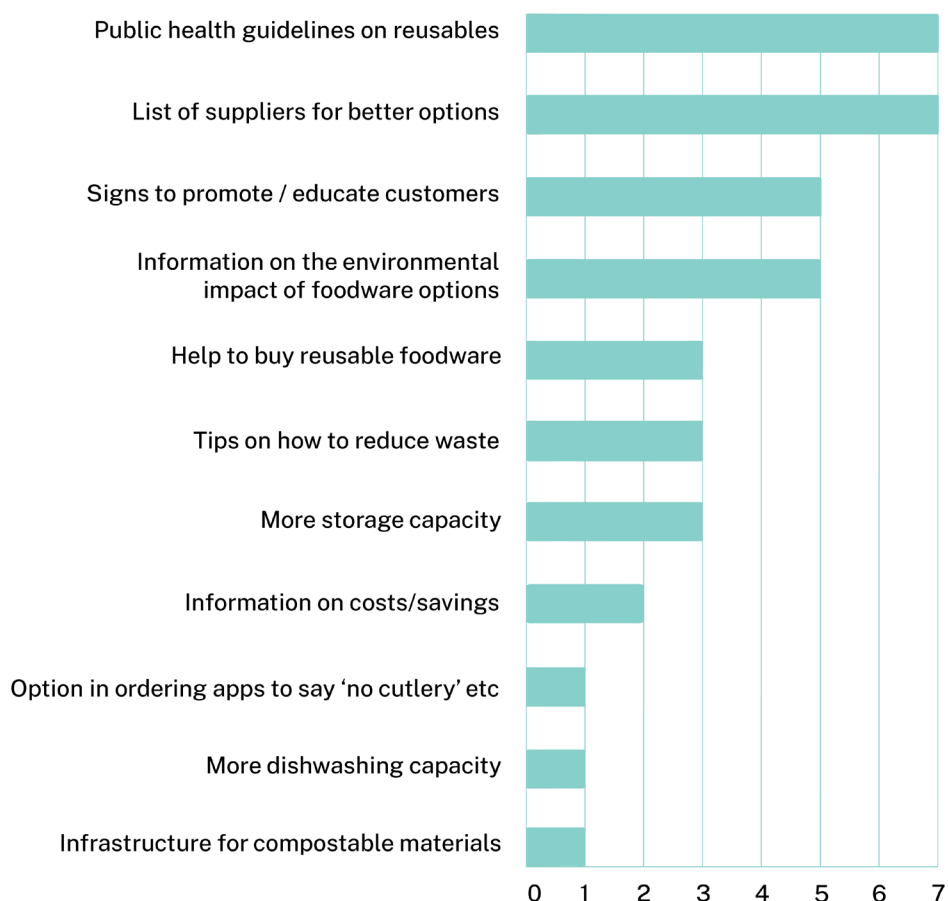


Figure 3. What would help businesses to reduce single-use foodware and choose reusable items.

Other frequently mentioned topics were related to promotion and education to customers about the impact of single-use foodware and the reusable alternatives, and help to purchase reusable foodware (Figure 3).

Some business owners suggested that guidance and education would benefit business owners and help them understand the processes and the potential money savings of reusables and allowing customers to bring their own cup or container.

“But I think there needs to be an element of education provided somehow [to] get business owners’ attention. To help them understand that one change in the process is not as earth-shattering as they probably think it is, [...] and then to try and demonstrate to them that you do ultimately save a little bit of money by promoting it.” – Cafe owner, on offering reusable takeout options.

3.6. Businesses will benefit from increased literacy on single-use foodware among their customers

The majority of interviewed businesses do not actively promote their own reusable foodware options to their customers. This likely leads to less participation among customers (i.e. few people bring in refillable cups, or ask about reusable takeout foodware services). Municipal public education campaigns about the benefits of reducing single-use foodware can help businesses grow participation and become more comfortable encouraging customers to bring their own containers. Business owners reported that

It is not easy to change behaviours, and education and outreach may help people decide to take the extra effort in bringing their own containers or using a deposit and return system.

“It takes a certain mindset [...] it’s a little bit more work for the customer than usual. So that doesn’t necessarily happen overnight. It takes some nudging, whether from government, from businesses making it easier to do that [...] It can take some time [...] So yes, we’re trying to do our part to make it just a little bit more convenient”
- Restaurant owner, on customers choosing reusable foodware

As mentioned above, one business interviewed stood out from the others in the number of actions they have taken to reduce waste. This business reported that 60% of their customers currently bring their own reusable containers. They also provide a 50 cent discount to customers who bring their own mug. They promote this programming with signage and train their staff to encourage customers to bring their own or participate in their deposit and refund program. These educational practices are likely a significant reason for customer participation and should be tested and implemented in other businesses in the city.

“Just really good signage, letting people know that it’s an option. And also just training your staff to say, the first question when, you know, I’d like to have an almond latte. The first question should be ‘did you bring your own container today?’ And then you go forward from that, like, that is our first question”

– Cafe owner, on their success with promoting bring-your-own containers.

3.7. Businesses support efforts by the City to reduce waste, but are unaware of the City's Reduction Strategy

During the interviews, we discussed the City of Toronto's Single-Use Reduction Strategy, and the promotion of measures to reduce waste including "ask-first" policies before distributing single-use foodware, encouraging customers to "bring-your-own" containers, and encouraging the use of reusable takeout foodware services. Most businesses were not aware of the City's current work, but most saw the Strategy as a positive and viable approach.

"That will be great. We will support these kinds of programs and I think it will be successful". – Cafe owner, on the City's Single-Use Reduction Strategy.

We heard from a few businesses that the City's policies need to move quickly, and that they want more action to be taken. A few noted that setting city-wide regulations and requirements would benefit their business as it would reduce risks of losing customers and costs for businesses if the program remains voluntary.

"...The government needs to educate and inform the general population and impose a standard such that the restaurant doesn't look like they're imposing something on their clients on their own, because the problem is that being a restaurant, it's all about goodwill."

– Restaurant manager, on the need for city-wide regulations.

Businesses noted that funding and targeted support from the government for small businesses is needed as part of the strategy. The suggestions included guidance and support that recognizes the unique needs of small businesses, financial support to purchase reusable foodware or install dishwashers, and a standardized, municipally-run takeout foodware program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, Toronto food service businesses consider the environment and are already taking steps to reduce single-use items, offer reusable options, and noted that this benefits them in cost savings and customer loyalty. Restaurants and cafes in Toronto identified what supports would help them further reduce waste, including education campaigns, consistent municipal policies and programs, and funding support.

Based on our findings, below are recommendations to inform the City of Toronto's actions to reduce single-use and takeaway items.

- **Businesses care about the environment and are seeking guidance to take more action.** Many businesses are already taking steps to reduce single-use items, offer reusables and consider the environment when purchasing products. They would benefit from guidance on suppliers and clearer education about 'compostable' foodware.
- **Local businesses are already offering reusable takeout foodware alternatives - including allowing "bring your own containers" for customers and reusable takeout services - which offer valuable lessons for other businesses.** Businesses noted that using reusable foodware saves them money and is also something their customers

appreciate. The most successful examples of reusable takeout options appear to be in cafes, and lessons from these businesses can be shared with other types of food service businesses.

- **A municipal educational campaign targeting customers and the public on waste reduction would help business and public participation in waste reduction efforts.** Clear messages around the City's Single-Use Reduction Strategy and the benefits of reducing single-use foodware can help increase public participation and support.
- **Businesses want and will benefit from more guidance and information from the City on the safety of reusable foodware.** Public health messages clarifying that reusable foodware can be used safely, with guidance on how, could help businesses more confidently promote reusable options to reduce single-use foodware to their customers. Guidance on how to deal with 'bring your own' and other reusable foodware will support food service businesses in training and implementing those programs.
- **Businesses are amenable to municipal policies to reduce waste and see the City's Single-Use Reduction Strategy as a viable approach.** Some are ready for stricter and less voluntary measures to ensure that all businesses participate in the same actions to **reduce the impact on individual businesses.**

Credits and References

March 2022

This report was written by Dr. Rafaela F. Gutierrez (Program Lead of Social Science and Educational Programs from U of T Trash Team), Emily Alfred (Waste Campaigner for the Toronto Environmental Alliance) and Dr. Chelsea Rochman (Head of Operations and the Program Lead of Scientific Programming and Application from U of T Trash Team & Assistant Professor in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, U of T). Graphic design by Maria Chernova.

About the University of Toronto Trash Team: The U of T Trash Team is a science-based community outreach group made up of undergraduate and graduate students, postdocs, researchers, local volunteers and staff all working together with a common goal to increase waste literacy in our community while reducing plastic pollution in our ecosystems. Our local projects use research to inform policy and management, and education and community outreach to increase waste literacy, engage the public and implement effective solutions. We were founded in 2017 in collaboration with the Rochman Lab, part of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Toronto.

About the Toronto Environmental Alliance: For over 30 years, the Toronto Environmental Alliance has campaigned locally to find solutions to Toronto's environmental problems. As a not-for-profit organization, we work with

communities to advocate for a green, healthy and equitable city.

Acknowledgements

We thank our interviewees for participating in this study. We would like to thank the U of T Trash Team volunteers, Ronglan Cao, Devajyoti Chakraborty and Marcia Pedroza, for helping recruit the businesses and Yingxin Xie for help with transcription. We also want to thank Susan Debrececi and Jolene Cushman for supporting with communication.

Endnotes

1. The Strategy was endorsed by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) in 2020.
2. The six items are single-use plastic shopping bags, utensils, straws, stirrers, some food containers (foam and black plastic) and beverage can ring carriers. These items were selected due to prevalence in litter audits, lack of recyclability and availability of non-plastic and reusable alternatives.
3. Toronto had previously planned to include bans and restrictions on expanded polystyrene foam and black plastic food containers. However, that was dropped from the Strategy when the Federal ban details were announced which would ban those items nation-wide.
4. One of the coffee shops is located inside a zero-waste store.
5. Food containers: Suppli (<https://www.mysuppli.ca/>), Inwit (<https://www.inwit.ca/>) and Ozzi (<https://www.planetozzi.com/>)

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Toronto food service businesses are willing to change practices on single-use and reusable foodware – Government support and regulations can help:

Forthcoming regulations from federal and municipal governments to restrict and reduce single-use foodware present an important opportunity to address plastic pollution and achieve waste reduction and climate goals. As these regulations will impact local food service businesses in Toronto, data and insights from local businesses are important to shape policies, including Toronto's Single-Use Reduction Strategy. Here, we present key results from our recent study to inform action items and next steps.

In 2021, the University of Toronto Trash Team and the Toronto Environmental Alliance conducted a study to understand the challenges and opportunities local businesses experience in reducing single-use foodware and switching to reusable alternatives. Surveys and interviews were conducted with 12 small businesses from across Toronto including sit-down restaurants, quick service restaurants, cafes and a bakery. These businesses had varying levels of takeout from less than 1% to 100% of their service, though most businesses interviewed said that the amount of takeout and associated single-use foodware items increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Top Findings and Recommendations For Municipal Policy and Programs:

1) Food service businesses already consider the environment and have taken steps to reduce single-use items. However, many businesses are looking for more support and guidance to further reduce single-use items and switch to reusable alternatives.

- Almost all businesses that participated in the study reported that they have already taken actions to reduce waste, ranging from asking customers before providing single-use items (such as cutlery or napkins) to providing reusable alternatives to single-use items.
- Businesses reported that 'the environment' was the top consideration when purchasing foodware, above cost. However, we noted that many businesses are choosing to purchase more expensive foodware labeled as 'compostable', though it is not compostable in local facilities and is discouraged by the City. Businesses would benefit from guidance on suppliers and clearer education about 'compostable' foodware.

2) Local businesses already offer reusable takeout foodware alternatives - including allowing “bring your own containers” for customers and reusable takeout services - which offer valuable lessons for other businesses.

- Three quarters of businesses interviewed allow customers to bring their own cup or container for takeout. Of the businesses interviewed, 3 cafes currently offer a reusable takeout service, and 3 other businesses are considering it. (A reusable takeout foodware service is where customers can borrow or rent a reusable cup and return it later. This can be offered directly by the business or a third-party service).
- Businesses noted that using reusable foodware saves them money and is also something their customers appreciate.
- Cafes have the most successful examples of reusable takeout, and lessons from these businesses can be shared with other types of food service businesses.

3) A municipal educational campaign targeting customers and the public on waste reduction would help businesses and public participation in waste reduction efforts.

- Clear messages around the City’s Single-Use Reduction Strategy and the benefits of reducing single-use foodware can help increase public participation and support for new programs.

4) Businesses want and will benefit from more guidance and information from the City on the safety of reusable foodware.

- Public health messages clarifying that reusable foodware can be used safely, with guidance on how, could help businesses more confidently promote reusable options to reduce single-use foodware to their customers. Guidance on how to deal with ‘bring your own’ and other reusable foodware will support food service businesses in training and implementing those programs.

5) Businesses are amenable to municipal policies to reduce waste and see the City’s Single-Use Reduction Strategy as a viable approach.

- Some businesses said the City’s policies need to move quickly, and that they want more action to be taken.
- A few businesses noted that setting city-wide regulations and requirements would benefit their business as it would ‘level the playing field’ and reduce risks of losing customers and costs for businesses if the program remains voluntary.

In summary, we found many Toronto food service businesses consider the environment in business decisions and are already taking steps to reduce single-use items, offer reusable options, and noted that these actions can create benefits including cost savings and customer loyalty. Restaurants and cafes in Toronto identified what supports would help them further reduce waste, including education campaigns and consistent municipal policies and programs.



The findings of the study are published in full at:
<https://uofttrashteam.ca/singleusefoodware>

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