

# CASE STUDY: Café Umami



## BUSINESS PROFILE

**Name:** Café Umami  
**Business Type:** Café  
**Location:** Oakland, CA  
**On-site dining:** 16 seats  
**Take-out:** Yes  
**Warewashing:** Three-compartment sink  
**Employees:** 2

**Café Umami** is the creation of former microbiologist, Sungsoon Park, and partner Simon Lee, Art Institute graduate and local spear fisherman. The café specializes in complete and balanced grain bowls with a Japanese and Korean twist and serve an eclectic mix of espresso and fresh tea beverages. Customers order and pick up at the counter. About half of the orders are “to-go”. There’s a self-serve station stocked with to-go drink items (i.e. self-serve water with reusable tumblers, hot cup lids, sweeteners, creamers, sleeves, and wooden stir sticks). Diners bus their own tables, placing their dirty reusables for washing in a small bus tub. This restaurant experiences busy rushes in the morning, for lunch, after-school and an early dinner crowd.

## Packaging Practices prior to ReThink Disposable:

- ➔ Food orders served in a mix of reusable bowls and plates, but with disposable plastic bowls
- ➔ Cold beverages served in disposable plastic cups with lids and straws
- ➔ Hot drinks served in a mix of ceramic mugs or disposable paper cups with lids and sleeves (default is to a disposable unless the customer requests a “real” cup)
- ➔ Guests were offered stainless steel cutlery but disposable wooden chopsticks
- ➔ Napkins stacked in the self-serve area and on the counter
- ➔ During rush periods, staff defaulted to disposable plastic bowls



## Recommendations Implemented:

- ➔ Replaced disposable plastic cold cups, lids, and straws with reusable cups
- ➔ Increased limited supply of dishes and mugs and prioritized use of reusable dishware over disposable
- ➔ Staff now ask if guests are dining in the café for each order

Since implementing **ReThink Disposable**’s recommendations, Café Umami reduced their use of targeted disposable foodware items by an average **49%** and is preventing the use of **52,576** disposable items and **928** pounds of waste annually. Café Umami earns an ongoing annual net cost savings of **\$1,538** from the avoided disposable foodware purchases. In order to implement the recommendations, the owner spent **\$436.59 to purchase the reusable foodware**.

At first glance, this cafe did not appear to be an ideal program candidate because most items were served with reusable plates, bowls, and cups. However, when **ReThink Disposable** introduced one recommendation to the owner to reduce packaging and waste and save money (replace plastic cold cups with reusable ones), it soon became apparent that there were other potential single-use items to target. Most importantly, there was a significant opportunity to train staff to default to reusables for dine-in guests by always asking if an order is “for-here” or “to-go.” Park and Lee needed assistance in identifying less obvious single-use items that could be reduced and eliminated, and motivation to make a few operational changes like encouraging dine-in and stocking up on the reusables they already had.

The type of reusable cups purchased by the owner are being used for both hot and cold beverages and the plates that were purchased did not just replace a disposable plate, but also supplemented reusable bowls so fewer disposable bowls are used during rush times. The business owners were able to take advantage of StopWaste’s mini-grant to purchase the items they needed to set up for successful implementation.



*BEFORE: Single-use paper coffee cups with lids and single-use plastic bowl*



*AFTER: Reusable hot cups and bowl*

## 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.)
12-oz Plastic Cold Cup	Replace with reusable cup	50%	3.0	15,208	\$243	395
Plastic Cold Cup Lid	Eliminate use for dine-in orders	50%	0	15,208	\$152	117
Plastic Straw	Only upon request	50%	0	6,083	\$61	8
24-oz Plastic Bowl	Replace with porcelain bowl	29%	7.3	2,086	\$417	149
9-oz Paper Hot Cup	Replace with porcelain cup	50%	7.9	2,433	\$93	24
12-oz Paper Hot Cup	Replace with porcelain cup	40%	7.5	2,433	\$97	63
Plastic Hot Cup Sip Lid	Eliminate use for dine-in orders	75%	0	9,125	\$475	172
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>52,576</b>	<b>\$1,538</b>	<b>928 lbs.</b>

\*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

- \$1,538 in annual net cost savings
- 52,576 disposable items reduced per year
- 928 pounds of annual waste reduction
- 49% average reduction of disposable foodware used

*BEFORE and AFTER: Reusable cups replaced single-use cold cups with lids and straws*



**Sungsoon Park, Co-owner:** "Every business should use reusables, it's a sustainable option. There's no question or concern about this. It's just common sense."

ReThink Disposable is a program of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund conducted in partnership with 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](http://www.rethinkdisposable.org).



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