



Guide to Reusables

Choosing reusable is the most impactful strategy to reduce single-use plastic and achieve cost savings. This guide will explain the business and environmental case for choosing reusable, and will provide an overview of how to integrate reuse into your food service operations.

The case for reusables

Choosing reusable materials generates dual benefits of reducing waste and achieving cost savings.

At the top of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Waste Management Hierarchy, Reduce and Re-use are the most preferred environmental strategies. Through these strategies, we can extend the life of materials and prevent them from entering the waste stream.

While the initial cost of reusable products may seem more expensive than single-use plastic options, businesses can achieve cost savings over time through reductions in purchasing and potentially in waste hauling services. Reusable materials eliminate the need for ongoing purchasing to replace single-use items, and reduced disposal of single-use items also means reduced dumpster volume which could translate to fewer pick-ups and a lower hauling bill.

Finally, through the MNimize rebate program, eligible businesses can even receive up to \$500 toward the cost of replacing single-use plastic products with reusable alternatives. With this funding, the payback period on your reusable items will be shorter, meaning you can realize these cost savings sooner!



Dine-in Swap-portunities

A great place to start swapping in reusable options is your on-site service ware. This is an excellent opportunity to highlight your business's brand and style by selecting reusable products that fit your cuisine and atmosphere. You might even find that your new reusables can elevate the quality of your food and the experience of customers dining in.

Not sure what kind of reusable products you need?

Take an inventory of your:

- Plates, bowls, trays, baskets
- Glassware, cups, mugs
- Utensils (e.g. forks, spoons, knives, chopsticks, straws, stir sticks, tasting spoons)
- Ramekins

Depending on the food you serve, you might also have a need for some specialty items like:

- Ramen or soup spoons
- Ice cream dishes, tasting spoons, or long handled spoons
- Bento boxes
- Cocktail glasses
- Taco holders, molcajete and salsa bowls

We recommend purchasing enough tableware to cover your busiest meal given your dishwashing capacity.

A good estimate would be 150% of daily average transactions.

Once you've addressed your tableware, turn your attention to any other customer facing single-use items that might be swapped for reusable bulk dispensers. Examples include:

- Coffee creamer and sugar
- Condiments & sauces
- Salt, pepper & spices

When you've identified single-use plastic items that could be replaced by reusable options, or if you'd like assistance figuring out what could qualify, reach out to the MNimize team! We are happy to come on-site to help identify strategies to reduce single-use plastic and leverage funding opportunities to purchase reusable alternatives. We can even research reusable options at different price points and provide support in applying for funding.



Reusable to go

While reusables for on-site dining are nothing new, integrating these products into food service to go programs is becoming more popular. This can be accomplished through the creation of your business's own reusable to go program or through partnership with a third party reusable provider.

If you have a community of loyal, regular customers, you might consider starting your own reusable to go program. This would be something like a library check-out system, in which customers could pay a one-time deposit to receive food in a reusable container that they could trade out when purchasing their next order.



Per the state's food code, reusable to go containers for food are allowed if they are washed, sanitized, and visually inspected by an employee of the food establishment that will be refilling the container.

This type of system works well for coffee shops and other food service businesses that see the same customers weekly or even daily. Reusable containers could also work well in catering operations as there might be a contract with customers that could include a deposit for reusable trays, carafes, etc.

For those that do not see the same customers as frequently, a better option might be to join a local network of reusable to go containers that allow customers to pick up containers at one participating restaurant and drop them off at another. In Minnesota, there are currently several local companies that offer this type of third party reusable to go programs for restaurants and other food service businesses: [r.Ware](#), [Foreverware](#), and [Good to Go](#). There are also some out-of-state providers that are offering reusable to go container services mainly for corporate and college campuses, hospitals, and other closed systems. These include [Ozzi](#) and [REUSO](#).

If starting your own reusable program or partnering with a third party company don't seem like the best fit for now, consider offering a discount to customers that bring in a reusable beverage container for refill!

Choose to Reuse!

If you're ready to get rid of single-use plastic and make the switch to reusables, the MNimize team is here to help! We'll come visit your business to identify opportunities and provide ongoing assistance through the implementation process. After your reusables have been in place for some time, we'll follow up to check in on how things are going, estimate your plastic reduction and potential cost savings, and promote your achievement to your customers and our broader MNimize audience!

Ready to ditch single-use plastic? We're here to help!
Visit our contact page and we'll be in touch to learn more about your business and help you identify reduction opportunities.
Or, if you have any questions, feel free to reach out directly at hello@mnimize.org.

