

Canteens and single use plastics

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Supporting a sustainable environment

In recent years our focus towards creating sustainable environments has increased. In schools, students are becoming keenly aware of the challenges we are facing due to our dependence on disposability and convenience.

In 2020, the WA government announced a roadmap to reduce our reliance on single-use plastics. The **Plan for Plastics** (PfP) will be rolled out in two main stages, the first will affect school canteens. That is:

Regulations will be developed and implemented by 2023 for the State-wide phase-out of plastic plates, cutlery, stirrers, straws, thick plastic bags, and polystyrene food containers

Many canteen products are packaged in plastic containers, cups or bottles and served with plastic cutlery and straws. Lots of food items brought to school from home are also packaged in single-use plastic, including home-made sandwiches, snack wrappers, single-serve biscuits or crackers and yoghurt containers.

However, many of our schools have already implemented a range of plastic reduction strategies, such as:

- Removing all straws from the canteen
- Replacing single-use packaging with:
 - reusable alternatives that can be washed and used again
 - compostable materials such as cardboard or bamboo
- Adding extra bins to help students separate waste and recyclables, especially in areas near the canteen and undercover areas
- Registering for [Containers for Change](#).

Modelling important behaviours for students and showing them that reducing single-use plastics is achievable will have a long lasting impact!



Steps to take in the canteen



Small changes can make a big difference and if you start implementing them gradually your changes will be better accepted by the school community.

Consider the following **six steps** to develop a timeline for implementing change. Use the [WASCA Action plan template](#) to make it even easier to stay on track and reach your goals.

STEP 1 – Create interest

- Work with teachers and find out what students will be learning about waste reduction
- Help the environment by reusing containers where possible, i.e. pass containers used in the canteen on to teachers for arts and crafts e.g. egg cartons, boxes
- Your school may also already have a sustainability committee or environmental club. If there's no committee yet, arrange a meeting with the principal and ask for their support in setting one up. Once you've got your group of like-minded people together, gaining momentum can make change easier
- Create a fact-sheet or poster about the devastating impact that single-use plastic has on our environment in order to get people on your side. Find some strong statistics, visuals to grab attention and recommended alternatives and solutions
- Create a petition to stick to the wall, window or door of the canteen that students, staff and parents can sign if they are in support of a single-use plastic free school
- Get involved in school programs and activities e.g.
 - plastic free or 'nude food' lunch days
 - a clean-up roster, where each year group cleans up after lunch one day per week; this will also discourage students from creating so much waste to begin with
 - conduct a waste audit, see the [Waste Wise schools program](#) for a toolkit.



STEP 2 – Investigate alternatives

- Make a list of all single-use plastic items that are currently in use e.g. plastic cutlery, plastic plates, bowls and cups, bin bags, biscuit packets, sauce sachets, teabags, and drink bottles
 - Keep this list for future reference – in a few weeks and months it will serve as a reminder of the changes you've made
 - Start by choosing one item and thinking of an easy alternative. For example, you could swap a tomato sauce sachet with a large bottle of tomato sauce that students can use if they need. If you are worried about mess talk to student councilors about supervising this area
- Consider swapping items for reusable alternatives, such as ceramic mugs, stainless steel cutlery and reusable containers. If this isn't viable consider cardboard, bamboo, or 'compostable plastics'
- Provide mugs instead of disposable cups for catering at meetings and events e.g. parent teacher nights
- Contact suppliers about alternatives; consider quantity required, minimum order requirements and cost
- Gradually phase out items.



STEP 3 – Menu planning

- Review the menu through an environmental lens. For example:
 - If you currently sell flavoured milk in plastic bottles, can you source this from the same or a different supplier in cartons
 - Will items stay just as fresh if wrapped in paper rather than plastic
 - Can you serve an item on a napkin or piece of waxed paper (eco friendly) only
- Could you make items in the canteen rather than buying pre-prepared items e.g. icy poles or popcorn
- Think about how to incentivise the activity e.g.
 - Like coffee shops, you could use reward cards to get student and staff to bring their own reusable items
 - Give students a discount or house/faction points if they supply their own cup for soup
- Think about food miles (i.e. how far food has it travelled from the paddock to the plate) and how to reduce them:
 - try to make foods from fresh ingredients
 - use seasonal locally grown produce; it will be of higher quality as it has not been in storage for months, for a full list of what's in season in your region see the [Buy West Eat Best](#) website and look out for their logo
 - for packaged foods, choose those that have been grown, produced and manufactured locally or a least in Australia.



STEP 4 – Reduce or reuse food waste

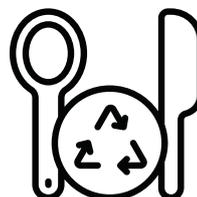
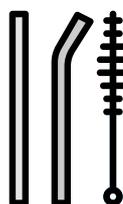
- Collect food waste and ensure it is disposed of correctly e.g. compost bin, worm farm, chicken coup, organic bins
- Ensure food is stored correctly to extend shelf life
- Use a lunch order system to make food to order
- "USE BY" is about food safety. Your food has to be eaten before this date. "BEST BEFORE" is about food quality. Food can still be safe to eat after this date if stored correctly.



- Reduce food waste by:
 - making up specials and meals deals at the end of the week to use up any leftover goods
 - tracking your sales and wastage with best practice record keeping
 - using leftover bread crusts for bread crumbs or croutons for salads
 - include leftover sliced tomatoes and vegetables to make pasta sauce or pizza toppings
 - use leftover fruit salad to make smoothies or frozen fruit blocks.

STEP 5 – Fundraising activities

- Some schools may want to use reusable products such as containers and cutlery for items sold in the canteen. If so, getting students on board early will be imperative to ensure they return the items each time. There are a number of ways to encourage students to do this:
 - have a token system
 - provide a discount for reusable items returned for use on next purchase
 - make it easy by placing containers around the school for returns not just at the canteen, have the environmental committee members collect and return to the canteen at the end of the lunch period
- Ensuring reusable products are cleaned effectively is vital. Make sure you have appropriate facilities in the canteen for washing them i.e. commercial grade dishwasher. If you don't have a dishwasher and/or you are concerned about the higher cost of using compostable materials such as cardboard or bamboo, work with the school and parent body to **raise funds** to support these changes in the canteen. If the school community can see this as part of a bigger plan to protect our planet and our kids, they are more likely to support your goals. Some fundraising reusable items:
 - Reusable cups
 - Reusable drink bottles
 - Reusable cutlery sets
 - Thermos
 - Stainless steel straws
 - Beeswax wraps.



STEP 6 – Celebrate the impact



- Tell people what the canteen is doing on a regular basis
- Look back at your purchases of single use plastics before and then put a notice in the newsletter or on social media about the hundreds or even thousands of single-use plastics no longer used in the canteen.
- Help WASCA to inspire others by telling us about your journey so we can share it on our website or Facebook. Simply email us about the big or small changes at your school - wasca@education.wa.edu.au