

GUILT-FREE TO GO

Consumer demand for convenience is growing at the same time as our awareness of the damage we're doing to the planet with plastic packaging. Is there a way to reconcile the two trends?

Delivery may only make up 3% of the restaurant transactions, but it's a fast-growing part of the foodservice sector. Ordering dinner through the delivery portals has become a routine part of most consumer's week. But there's one big problem. While delivery services might satisfy our desire for food to our doorsteps, fast, it goes against one of our other growing priorities – limiting the damage we're doing to the planet with plastic packaging.

Many of the key culprits come from the foodservice industry. And while discerning consumers are rejecting deliveries that are over-packaged or use containers that can't be recycled, many operators are still using plastic and Styrofoam as well as old-fashioned aluminum containers, according to foodservice consultant Arlene Spiegel FCSI, founder and president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates.

“There are so many ‘better for the planet’ options available today however the cost is high,” Spiegel says. “Traditional paper goods and packaging typically used in fast-casual or fast-food concepts can be 5% of total sales. The better packaging, including disposable straws and lids, can bring that up to 7%.”

Infrastructure and education

One of the biggest challenges the foodservice industry faces when it comes to reducing its impact on the planet is the lack of recycling and composting infrastructure.

For Spiegel, the solution is for restaurants and delivery companies to collaborate with industry and governments to aggressively broadcast new standards and the consequences of not sticking to them. “Governments can provide standards, incentives and/or penalties much like in the carbon producing industries,” she says. “The grocery industry was an early adopter by eliminating plastic bags and providing discounts for customers who bring their own reusable bags. The industry did the same thing with refrigerants, chemicals and animal testing.”

“It's common sense for all parties, especially the public and environmentalists, to work together. Change will happen when consumers use the power of the purse and the press to force all parties to do the right thing,” says Spiegel. ■