

Case Study- Park Beach Cafe

A sustainability ethos embraced by the community

Park Beach Cafe is a cosy gem in the heart of Dodges Ferry, known not only for its delicious coffee and food, but also for its strong sense of community.

Just steps away from the popular Park Beach, this café is leading the charge in reducing single-use plastics.

Swapping plastic milk bottles for a milk keg system, working closely with suppliers to cut down on plastic behind the scenes, and making the switch to compostable foodware, Park Beach Café is demonstrating their commitment to sustainability.

We caught up with owner William Kingston to hear about these changes and how the local community has embraced their efforts.

Who is Park Beach Cafe?

“We took over the cafe three and a half years ago. At that point it was mainly takeaway, and we were open four days a week. Living in the community, I knew there was a greater need for a family-friendly food environment. Since then, we’ve grown very consistently. We’re now open seven days a week.

We aim to work very closely with local suppliers, sourcing the best local produce and serving that to our community in a way that is affordable. It does really bring our community together, and that’s what I’ve always wanted for Park Beach. We look after our locals first and foremost. We aim to be supporting, loving and to have a community feel.

Tell us about the reusable foodware initiatives you’ve implemented.

“We now use the 18 L milk kegs from [The Udder Way](#). The milk we use is supplied by a local family who run Bream Creek Dairy. We’ve always used their milk, but now it comes in kegs instead. We go through six kegs a week, and each keg is equivalent to nine milk cartons. All the

kegs get cleaned and reused. We used to have a full recycling bin of waste every week, now it's not much at all because we're not using anywhere near the amount of plastic bottles.

Our food and beverage packaging are cardboard, and all of our foodware is compostable.

At the beginning of Covid we were really onto asking our customers to bring their own reusable cups. During Covid, this lapsed a lot as people were more cautious about the handling of their cups. The question for us has been how to get people back into the habit of bringing their cup with them. A lot of people already do this, and we really encourage it.

Just after Covid, we started working with our back-of-house suppliers to switch away from single-use plastics. Our salads used to arrive in plastic bags, now we use tubs and exchange them at each delivery. We use about seven or eight suppliers from Hobart, and we have a similar setup with them all.

We've also recently installed a keg system for serving IPA beer, in partnership with T-Bone Brewing Co."

What made you decide to transition away from single-use plastic foodware towards reusables?

"Having worked in the food system, both on farms and in cafes, seeing the waste was eye opening. Even just the amount of plastic in the recycling bins, we had to ask ourselves how we could reduce the amount of cartons. We go through so much milk, particularly in the summer when we were filling our recycling bins every couple of hours.

The Udder Way and Bream Creek Dairy approached us and we thought, this is an amazing product. From day-dot we were really onboard. There is an outlay cost, but overall the system doesn't cost anything extra, and the up-keep is actually easier and quicker for baristas on the machine. It's just a press of a button. Logistically for the business it made total sense. Instead of unloading four crates of milk, we now only have a keg to scan and load.

When we were approached by Plastic Free Places about our foodware, we were already almost there. There were a few things that I didn't realise contained plastic, like our hot cups. So we made a conscious effort to be more mindful about what we were purchasing.

The changes we've made have required a change in our mindset and habits. We work hard to identify the plastic we use and really think about small first steps we can take to make changes. We are making small, conscious decisions which, combined with everyone else's actions, all adds up."

What was the first single-use plastic item you switched away from?



"We started with milk. I was already very mindful about plastic, so we thought we should start with the area that was producing the most amount of waste for us, which was our milk cartons."

What were the challenges when moving away from single-use plastic, and how did you overcome these?

"New systems equal new protocols. With the milk keg it's really important that you make sure it's cleaned in a particular way every day. This required making sure that the staff are trained in how to clean it properly. Little things like that you don't really think of, but at the same time it can be serious if it's not done correctly. It has required us to be more mindful of these processes.

The Udder Way was great at providing help when we needed it. Originally I was very hesitant, I didn't know how to maintain the keg system and it also introduced questions around how to manage OHS with staff needing to handle an 18 L keg. The Udder Way provided us with all the information we required. They gave us a run-through of how to clean and season the system properly. I can also call them up at any time with any issues I have. With all the support, it's a no-brainer to sign-up.

Some of the compostable products we use aren't as durable as plastic alternatives, which has meant that for some foods we've had to find ways to get around it. For example, we line our cardboard burger boxes with greaseproof paper which acts as a barrier and keeps the box dry. It's still a better outcome than using plastic containers. It's nothing too extreme, but it just requires a few extra steps to make sure our customers are still getting a positive experience."



Reusable mugs for sale at Park Beach Café

What are some positive outcomes you've achieved?

"From a business point of view, having our milk in kegs rather than plastic cartons or bottles is very positive. It shows the community that we are actively trying to reduce our waste and that we aren't unnecessarily wasting plastic. They recognise that it's not an easy thing to do, but can see that we are trying to make progress and doing what is best for our environment.

Being so close to the ocean, we're trying to be as sustainable as possible with not only our food, but in everything that we do. We try to make sure 90% of the products we use are local and that we're not shipping things in from the mainland. Park Beach's ethos is why the community supports us."

What would you say to other cafes who are thinking of transitioning away from single-use plastic foodware?

“Switching to milk kegs is the easiest thing to do. If you have the space for an 18L keg, it’s definitely worthwhile for the time and effort that is involved.”

What’s next in sustainability/plastic reduction?

“Our next point of call is back-of-house, and we’ve already made some first steps with changing to reusables with our suppliers. Coffee is our next focus. Our coffee beans currently come in bags that aren’t reusable, so we’re looking at switching to a bucket system. Being so far from Hobart, this can be a bit of a challenge. At the moment I’m trying to find the best solution that doesn’t compromise quality.”