



Greenport is going green.

Late on a Thursday evening, I had the pleasure of joining several influential and passionate people in Greenport's little Red School House to discuss some exciting plans to help the environment. The mission? Plastic reduction in restaurants.

Maybe you have already heard about this initiative started by the [Product Stewardship Institute](#), a Boston-based nonprofit that is "committed to minimizing the negative health, environmental, and economic impacts of consumer products and packaging—particularly at the end of the products' intended usefulness." Four Greenport businesses volunteered to be part of their [Trash Free Waters Project](#) including Bruce and Son, Little Creek Oysters, Lucharitos, and Tikal 1. This news was announced by [Suffolk Times](#), [Southold Local](#), and [North Fork Patch](#) back in March, but I wondered, how has this initiative progressed since then?

A lot of my questions were answered during this Marine Debris Reduction Meeting. I learned that Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) chose the area of Greenport for a few specific reasons. PSI received funding from EPA Region 2, which serves the NY area, to conduct this project on plastic reduction in restaurants by at least 40%. Greenport was chosen because of its proximity

to the rich and natural resource of the Peconic Estuary, but also because of its high concentration of restaurants. One meeting attendee called it the “restaurant mecca of the East End.”



According to [The Ocean](#)

[Conservancy](#), 7 of the top 10 marine debris items are all related to food service. They include items such as food wrappers, straws, bottles and caps, plastic cups and lids, and more. These items are all single-use, disposable products that wind up on the beach not just by littering, but through wind, washing down storm drains, even escaping garbage trucks or garbage cans when pests go digging in the trash. And because plastic does not fully degrade, it just continues to break down into smaller and smaller pieces. That means any plastic found on the beach is going to stay in the environment unless we pick it up.

The beaches surrounding Greenport are no different. PSI staff conducted surveys on Mitchell Park beach and found that the most common items were similar to the Ocean Conservancy’s list. While some of this debris has likely floated in from just about anywhere, it is still important that we reduce waste from the start.

So what have the restaurants accomplished so far? Here are a few things that I was happy to hear:

- Lucharitos switched to eco packaging in their Aquebogue location, and plan to install a filtered water station for their Greenport customers. They stopped automatically giving out straws with their water glasses and Mark LaMaina, owner of Lucharitos, said “the customers don’t miss them, and we have noticed a difference in waste and plumbing clogs in our system.”

- Tikal eliminated the plastic covers that used to go over their handmade tablecloths from Guatemala, instead opting to purchase more sets of the handmade cloths so they can switch them out more often. They no longer automatically give out utensils and straws to every take-out customer, only providing them on request.
- Bruce and Son, which started their plastic reduction before approached by PSI, have eliminated all but four plastic items! They are looking into options so they can go completely plastic-free.
- Little Creek Oysters stopped giving out lids on drinks and only provides straws on request. As a result, owner Rosalie Rung said they haven't had to repurchase straws in over a year.



All these plastic items were found on a Southold beach. Though they will only be used for a few minutes each, these petroleum-based products would last in the environment forever.

The businesses all said they have had positive feedback from their customers. I spoke to Kassata Bollman, owner of Bruce and Son, about this in more detail. She said that the changes “spark a conversation” between the staff and customers. When customers noticed the change from plastic to paper bags, they want to know why, and it’s an opportunity to talk about the Trash-Free Waters project. Interestingly, some of their customers think the paper bag is “too fancy” for their take-out food, and say they don’t need it!

However, there are still some challenges to be solved before the funding for this project runs out in February. One of the distributors to the Greenport area lacks many ecofriendly options for take-away food, like paper straws,

birch or bamboo utensils, or other kinds of containers for cold beverages or hot soups. We discussed the expense of these options, and while the restaurants get a \$1,500 grant to help offset the costs of the greener options, that can only last so long. This shows how only the demand and support of alternative products will make these products more available to businesses and consumers and reduce costs. The restaurants owners discussed the possibility of a cooperative purchasing program so they could buy items in bulk, hopefully saving money.



Lucharitos is phasing out their former plastic takeaway materials in favor of eco-packaging.

Until then, there are some things we can do as customers to support this initiative. We can dine in rather than take out, or bring our own containers for takeout food and beverages. We can refuse the single-use utensils and use our own at home. Many of my friends carry around the portable bamboo utensils and reusable straws in case we have to take things on-the-go. We can also encourage other businesses to follow suit. There are already a few in Greenport that have made similar strides on their own, like Greenport Brewery switching back to pint glasses instead of cups, and Andy's restaurant which doesn't use plastic bags or Styrofoam containers.

I liked how one restaurant owner summarized the need for this project:

"It is in every business's best interest to make these changes, if for nothing else to keep up with the businesses that are doing it for the right reasons. We're all positioned to be influencers with this program. If you're operating a food business and you don't care what happens with your product, both the food and the packaging it comes in, you will be left in the dust in the next 3-5 years. The sooner we all jump in to go green with packaging, the sooner the price of green products goes down, and it's easier for all of us to join in the game."

I think the Village of Greenport is going to be a huge role model for other areas surrounding Peconic Estuary to be more sustainable. Not only that, but we can all be role models if we make a few small changes in our daily routine, which will inspire others around us to change their behavior, too. I'm looking forward to seeing just how this initiative pans out past February, and hope to see more restaurants (and customers) join in on the plastic reduction movement.