

CASE STATEMENT: REDUCING FOOD WASTE

Tortilleria Y Tienda De Leon's

Over the past 20 years, Tortilleria Y Tienda De Leon's has earned a reputation as a leading producer of fresh tortillas, Mexican grocery specialties and beloved food for Portland's growing Latino community.

Their celebrated items can be found at New Seasons Market and Whole Foods throughout the region. But the company's culture of food waste prevention and sustainability is less widely known.



The Opportunity

Tortilleria Y Tienda De Leon's manufactures an enormous amount of food each day. In fact, there are multiple channels of production—the tortilla factory, the restaurant and catering business, the commercial kitchen—and still they manage to produce less than two full roll-carts of food waste for composting which is a relatively small amount of food given the size of the operation. This is the result of a years' long effort to promote a culture of sustainability and resourcefulness by owner, Lucy De Leon, and her family.

**Food Waste
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The Process

Tortilleria Y Tienda De Leon's believes that food is a precious resource. The business uses four prevention strategies: tracking and planning, repurposing, sourcing and portion options. Through careful tracking and menu planning they work to fully utilize all ingredients and produce only as much food as needed daily. What can't be used is repurposed—today's lunch counter chilis are tomorrow's salsa and unused cooked meats become the stuffing for gorditas. The restaurant also prevents food waste through sourcing by ordering vegetables and fruits that meet quality standards but are considered imperfect because of their appearance. They incorporate these into salsas, tortas and tamales where the aesthetics of the ingredients are not essential. These veggies and fruits are far more cost effective for the business and may be wasted otherwise.

Tortilleria Y Tienda De Leon's also has involved their customers in reducing waste. The restaurant previously provided five tortillas with each plate, but often a few were wasted. Tortilleria Y Tienda De Leon's staff began asking each customer how many they'll eat, so the portion ordered is individualized, and the excess avoided.

Finally, Lucy de Leon composts leftover food scraps including the trimmings from the kitchen preparation area and any leftover food from the dining area. Any cutting scraps in the kitchen are composted. When customers are done eating, they leave their dishes in a dish tub, and the employees separate food scraps so it can be composted or given to a local farmer to feed livestock. Sorting the food scraps from the dish tubs also helps staff keep an eye on what food is uneaten, so they can continue to refine their approach to reducing food waste.



The Results

Lucy de Leon and her family are committed to reducing food waste and promoting a culture of sustainability. They plan to continue their work with the City of Gresham to maximize their waste reduction strategy and minimize environmental impacts.

- **Food waste prevention has been a core value for many years at Tortilleria Y Tienda de Leon's.** This value has been shared and acted upon across the organization.
- **Tortilleria y Tienda De Leon's staff tracks usage closely.** Tracking what ingredients are being used daily helps them order and prepare only what they need to meet the demands of their customers.
- **Repurposing leftover ingredients for other menu items reduces waste.** Today's lunch counter chilis are tomorrow's salsa and unused cooked meats become the stuffing for gorditas.
- **Purchasing produce that is imperfect helps cut waste and saves money.** Fruits and vegetables that are considered imperfect because of their appearance are incorporated to recipes.
- **Customer involvement is key.** By giving customers a choice and asking them how many tortillas they want with each plate, they reduce the number of tortillas being thrown out.
- **Dish room waste sorting allows customers plate scrapings to be composted.** It also helps kitchen managers note what is not being eaten so they can take additional waste prevention actions.
- **Kitchen scraps are composted.** Employees do their best to utilize all ingredients they can. Any trimmings or other food they cannot use in dishes is collected in green buckets around the kitchen for composting.
- **As a result, less than two full roll carts of food are composted weekly.** This is a relatively small amount given the size of the operation. Food scraps are composted or given to a local farmer to be fed to livestock.