

Compostable Packaging for Restaurants

The COVID crisis brought out many new shopping habits. One of those shopping habits that changed how we consume is an increase in carry out food. Doordash, Grubhub or curbside pick up- it’s here to stay. The increase in carry out has also increased the trash going into landfills. The ZCoC saw a problem and thought that they could be a part of the solution.

The Boone County Solid Waste Management District hands out small grants for purchasing a variety of items from benches to recycling containers to playground equipment. The Executive Director of the Zionsville Chamber filled out the application with the BCSWMD for compostable containers. These containers represent a first step in introducing businesses to compostable products, including packaging made from sugar cane reed, wheat reed and corn starch (like straws that are comparable to plastic straws in feel and usability). In January the ZCoC was awarded $2600 to purchase compostable packaging for member restaurants.

While this grant represents a small fraction of the packaging used in a month, the plan has been to test the packaging in a few member restaurants, show proof of concept, and look for larger grants to supply the restaurant community in Zionsville with more packaging for longer. The scalability of the project is apparent, and so is the need. Interns of the ZCoC from Zionsville High School are working on the educational component to accompany the packaging- educating consumers on the packaging, encouraging composting, and asking for consumers to leave a positive review for the restaurants using the packaging.

This working project has us testing packaging, comparing to packaging already used, and gathering feedback. The venture into a new area of helping our members has been challenging how we think of our role as a chamber and the reach we have to positively impact our merchants and the environment. Also, how we facilitate purchasing packaging that has traditionally been more expensive (buying consortium? Bulk purchasing?) to help encourage long-term use and consumer compliance.

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