

## Restaurants work together to improve sustainability

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Mount Desert Islander

May 14, 2018

<https://www.mdislander.com/maine-news/restaurants-work-together-to-improve-sustainability>



*Representatives of A Climate to Thrive and area foodservice business owners met last month at Havana to brainstorm options for composting and reducing the amount of plastic and plastic foam they use. [Photo courtesy of Joe Blotnick]*

BAR HARBOR — Approximately one-third of food produced for human consumption is wasted, according to the United Nations. That works out to nearly 1.3 billion tons annually worldwide.

Restaurants in Bar Harbor are working together to find uses for food lost in preparation and left on plates after meals. Further, they are looking to reduce waste from to-go containers, flatware, returnable bottles, cans, cups and straws.

More than 20 area foodservice business owners and representatives from A Climate to Thrive met April 25 at Havana restaurant to discuss more sustainable practices for their businesses. They talked about composting and using fewer plastic straws and plastic foam to-go containers, or eliminating them altogether.

The project was started by Michael Boland, owner of Havana, Choco-Latte and Islesford Dock, and Martha Higgins, a longtime server at Galyn's, in February after a handful of restaurateurs

attended a meeting organized by A Climate to Thrive.

“I attended a workshop that had several other restaurateurs [and] caterers in it, and we realized we had a lot of the same issues/problems in achieving our goals,” Boland said in an email. “Restaurants, cafes and caterers ... are a major part of the economy of the island and ... getting us all on the same path with regards to sustainability could be a major game changer.”

More than 50 local restaurants and markets have expressed interest in the initiative, which ACTT supports, according to project manager Jill Higgins.

Boland said Choco-Latte has used biodegradable and compostable straws and to-go cups made using cornstarch since opening in 2014.

While the cups and straws are compostable, they have been thrown in the regular trash to be incinerated at Penobscot Energy Recovery Company. He said employees will begin sorting out straws and cups from the trash “this season.”

Thrive Juice Bar, Hannaford and The Jackson Lab send food waste to a facility in Exeter with a company called Agri-cycle. Using a process called “anaerobic digestion,” the facility harvests greenhouse gases from food waste and converts it to energy and fertilizer.

The group of restaurateurs hopes that if more businesses begin using the service, costs might come down.

“It’s pricy, but as much as you want to be green, you have a bottom line to worry about,” said Amanda Kendall, owner of Sassafras Catering in Town Hill. “You have to make sure the price works.”

Sassafras currently composts with College of the Atlantic’s Peggy Rockefeller Farms. Kendall said her agreement with the farm is exclusive and she sends all of her compost from prep to leftovers to the farm.

Gail Leiser, co-owner of Galyn’s, said her restaurant has switched to paper straws and paper bags, and has cut out a large portion of plastic items. Galyn’s and other restaurants are offering new, more expensive straws on demand, rather than putting them in every drink.

“Galyn’s is all-in on the idea of sustainability,” Leiser said in an email. “We’re looking for substitutes for the plastic items we do use, [and] we’re interested in the possibility of composting our seafood waste.”

Hard shells from clams and oysters often need to be broken down into smaller pieces to help them break down faster. Cyndi Bridges, owner of Peekytoe Provisions, said their oysters shells are sent through a wood chipper before being composted.

ACTT’s zero waste committee is supporting possible future town plastic-foam-container and plastic-bag bans. Belfast banned plastic bags last August. Blue Hill voters also banned plastic bags and plastic foam containers by a 139-56 at their April town meeting.