

Case Study 1:

La Playa Mexican Grill, Port Aransas, Texas



This family-owned and operated restaurant has been in operation since 2003 and draws on generations of culinary experience. La Playa is situated directly on the bay in the Gulf of Mexico and serves Mexican food, with a specialty in local seafood. In addition to sit-down dining, La Playa provides takeout service and catering.

- ~ Years of reducing plastic: **14**
- ~ Table tops: **12 inside, 4 outside**
- ~ Meals served per day: **250 on average**, up to **400 in the summer**

Green Measures

La Playa is a polystyrene-free restaurant that replaced plastic to-go bags and straws with paper and plant based ones, which are supplied upon request.

Why

La Playa was the first restaurant in the Port Aransas area to adopt these sustainability measures, which owner Greg Villasna determined were **“just the right thing to do.”** In a region heavily impacted by petrochemicals, he noted, **“[reducing plastic] benefits everyone in the long run.”**

How they selected products and vendors

The restaurant located green alternative packaging through Cisco foods.

Difficulties

The eco-friendly materials cost more, but the restaurateur indicated that he was not “particularly worried about pennies when you have to do what’s right.” All told, he has not seen fit to raise La Playa’s prices. After an initial trial with paper straws, the restaurant switched to plant-based ones, which hold up better against moisture.

Reception & Impact

Customers make positive comments about La Playa’s sustainable practices, and the staff has not been impacted by an increase in work or customer management. Supplying bags and straws only on request reduced their use by 25%. The changes proved to be trend-setting, with nearby restaurants implementing a similar retreat from plastic. Mr. Villasna wishes that the area chamber of commerce would make Port Arkansas a green zone so other businesses would have to follow suit.

