

The Last Plastic Straw



NOSSA FAMILIA provides single-use straws and sleeves only upon request, and sells reusable straws (opposite left). If customers want a to-go cup, it will cost them a quarter, but those who bring their own mug will save a little extra (opposite right).

Embracing Sustainability

BY ROBIN ROENKER

At Portland, Oregon's Noss Familia Coffee, sustainability is a central tenet of the café's culture—and it has been from day one.

Founded in 2004 by Brazilian native Augusto Carneiro, whose family has grown coffee for generations, Noss Familia became the first Certified B Corporation roaster in Oregon in 2016, a designation given only to "purpose-driven" businesses that can illustrate the positive impact of their operations, products, and services.

"Our approach to sustainability really stems from the vision of our owner," says Karen Lickteig, Noss Familia's director of marketing and sustainability. "His family has been growing coffee

since the 1890s, and so for us, sustainability is not just a marketing term. It's about treating the land right, treating growers right, supporting the supply chain, protecting the environment—it's a holistic view that recognizes the ways that all those things are wrapped up together."

Pursuit of Zero Waste

Noss Familia's commitment to environmental sustainability is evident in its daily operations, whether it's making stainless, silicone, and bamboo straws available to customers, offering plant-based milks, which have a lower carbon footprint than dairy, or providing certain disposable items, like coffee sleeves, only upon request.

The café's pursuit of zero-waste status was one driving factor behind its new 25-cent cup charge for all to-go cups, which it began implementing at each of its three Portland locations in late April.

The cup charge had been launched initially at the café's newest location, Seven Corners, last August as a sort of test case. The results were dramatic: While 80% of customers at Noss Familia's Pearl District location and 52% at its Central Eastside location typically got their drinks to go, the 25-cent upcharge at Seven Corners resulted in only 31% of customers ordering drinks to go in a disposable cup, with the majority of customers (52%) opting to enjoy their drink in house.



What’s more, after the upcharge at Seven Corners was enacted, 17% of Nossa Familia’s customers there began to bring in their own cups—more than triple the rate of their other two locations.

“We had already been giving a discount for bringing in your own cup—we’ve done that since day one—but we felt this new charge would be more effective in changing behavior,” says Lickteig. “Theories of behavioral economics tell us that people feel a loss of 25 cents twice as strongly as they feel a gain of 25 cents.”

With the café’s new pricing strategy—a standard menu price for drinking in house using one of Nossa Familia’s own reusable cups, 25 cents more for

a disposable to-go cup, or 25 cents less if you bring your own—customers who choose to bring their own to-go mugs essentially feel as if they’re saving 50 cents per cup over what it would cost them to get their coffee to go in a single-use cup.

“The response has been very positive,” says Lickteig. “We were getting five-star reviews on Yelp and Google from people, specifically noting their appreciation of what we were doing at Seven Corners to try to cut down on waste.”

Nossa Familia has also recently launched Little Free Cup Libraries at each of its Portland cafés, which encourage customers to take a cup/leave a cup, adopting the model from the

Little Free Libraries that are prevalent throughout the country.

Lickteig believes Nossa Familia is one of the first businesses in Portland to charge for to-go cups. It was a bold move—but one that’s paying off.

“We want our pricing to reward people who are choosing actions that are more sustainable,” says Lickteig. “And the money from the cup charge actually goes into a separate pool, which we plan to use to purchase carbon offsets to help us achieve our goal of becoming carbon neutral in the café.” ☕

Read more about Nossa Familia’s sustainability efforts, including a thoughtful analysis of the reasonings behind its new cup charge, at www.nossacoffee.com/blog.