



One Step in a Holistic Approach to Sustainability

By Robin Roenker

Across the country, cafés are finding that switching from plastic to sustainable straws offers both a simple and customer-approved means of advancing their overall efforts toward greater sustainability.

In La Crosse, Wisconsin, Global Grounds Coffee has been offering stainless steel straws both for purchase and for in-store “borrowing” since its opening in December 2016. The response has been entirely positive.

“I would ask customers early on, ‘Are you comfortable drinking out of this stainless steel straw?’ And the response was always a very enthusiastic, ‘Heck, yeah,’” says owner Catherine Tyink, who notes that her café has a younger demographic, drawing largely from the nearby University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus.

“About 27 percent of our customers bring their own cup and straw each time they come in,” says Tyink. “We offer a

generous 25-cent discount every time they do that, and it really seems to help.”

To encourage even more reuse and less to-go waste, Tyink is preparing to launch a new “Carry Your Cup” campaign complete with round stickers featuring that mantra. She hopes folks will stick them on their travel mugs and cups as a way of spreading the message around campus about the importance of reuse.

In addition to the stickers, Tyink’s upcoming campaign will offer clients the choice of either five free coffees or \$2 off any single coffee drink when they purchase a reusable cup.

“It’s up to a \$10 value, so we’re really selling the cups at cost,” she says. “But we see it as value-added, because we’re not throwing all those [disposable] cups away.”

Offering reusable straws and cups, rather than disposables, is just one small step in Global Grounds’ overall sustainability efforts, which include offering

vegan food options, up-cycling furniture from resell shops, using only green cleaners and low-energy lighting, contracting with local artisans to craft reusable cup sleeves, and, as Tyink puts it, composting and “aggressively recycling.”

The café was the first in La Crosse to be certified by Travel Green Wisconsin, a program sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Tourism to recognize businesses that are committed to eco-friendly practices.

And while the sustainable straw component may be just one small piece of the café’s overall green initiative, it’s a small step that adds up, day in and day out, in terms of reducing waste.

“It’s staggering to think about the number of straws and cups that are thrown away nationwide on a daily basis,” says Tyink. “We just want to do our part to encourage customers to—as they say—‘Drink local and think global.’” 