

## ☕ Coffee Talk with John



**Please tell us about yourself, who are you and what do you do?** I split my 20s between a Washington DC political consulting firm and a touring rock band, and split my 30s acting in and producing films and TV shows. Now I'm raising two toddlers, handling admin duties for my wife's real estate business, and volunteering as the Executive Director of Plastic-FreeRestaurants.org, a non-profit dedicated to eliminating single-use petroleum-based plastic from restaurants and schools by subsidizing the purchase of reusable replacements.

**How did your journey towards sustainability begin and how did you come up with the initial idea?** A lot of parents take their kids to soup kitchens for volunteering opportunities; my folks took my sister and me to a recycling center. I had an early appreciation for the volume of stuff that Americans churn through, and I've had a lifelong aversion to plastic. That said, I also spent my first 45 years not really doing anything about it. The volume of single-use plastic I witnessed at a friend's newly-opened burrito shop in Hollywood was the spark for PlasticFreeRestaurants.org.

**What are the biggest challenges you face?** Fear of change is the single biggest hurdle to converting schools and restaurants to reusables. This is why case studies (from our partners at ReThink Disposable et al) showing that restaurants and schools SAVE MONEY by converting to reusables – even after accounting for increased labor, water, and electricity costs – are indispensable tools. In descending order, the next biggest challenges are lack of dishwashing infrastructure and the cost of purchasing reusable food ware; we are working on partnerships to ameliorate the former, and our subsidies eliminate the latter altogether.

**What is a possible future for your initiative? Where do you want to be within five years?** Eighteen months ago, we had subsidized four restaurants; today, we're at nearly 100 restaurants and schools. We expect to grow our visibility and impact exponentially in the next few years. Our ultimate goal is the elimination of single-use food ware across the United States, and our organization's resulting obsolescence.

**If you have three free wishes, what would you wish for?** 1. Governments worldwide to wake up and outlaw single-

Insights about the project  
**“We Pay Restaurants and Schools To Stop Using Plastic”**  
by John Charles Meyer, United States

use plastic food ware. 2. Governments worldwide to wake up and outlaw PFAS. 3. The US government to incentivize reuse, incentivize composting of food scraps, and outlaw the printing of recycling symbols on products that can't actually be recycled at existing facilities.

**What do you think we all can do to solve the plastic pollution problem in general?** Stop excusing our own personal use of single-use items. Bring a cup to Starbucks, bring bags to the supermarket, avoid products with unnecessary packaging, and bring reusables to picnics and birthday parties in the park. Be the change.

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