

**CASE STUDY**

**CHALLENGE**

From plate waste and kitchen scraps, to packaging and supplies, restaurants produce a large volume and variety of waste. Recycling and composting usually adds to the cost of waste disposal, even in cities with plentiful options. Staff training can be burdensome because of the high turnover rate typical in the restaurant industry.

**SOLUTION**

Start your recycling program on a small scale. Begin with materials that are easily recyclable and generated in high volumes. Once this is accomplished, add additional materials to your diversion program. Regular training and prompts will ensure that all employees learn your system.



**Overview**

BarFly Ventures is the parent company of a regional chain of bar and restaurants that includes HopCat, Stella's Lounge, Grand Rapids Brewing Co. and The Waldron Public House. Started in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2008, the chain has expanded to 10 more cities, with HopCat Lincoln opening in March of 2016. With 132 taps, HopCat Lincoln has Nebraska's largest selection of craft beer on tap, including more than 30 selections made in Nebraska.

HopCat isn't a typical restaurant. They recycle and compost 90 percent of their waste, landing them easily in the realm of Zero Waste. A crucial component of HopCat's Sustainability Program is their effort to eliminate unnecessary waste. They care deeply about the people they work with, the world we live in, the communities where they operate, and most importantly, the guests they serve each day.

**Waste Reduction Program Results**

<b>Waste diversion rate:</b>	<b>90%</b>
<b>Recyclables diverted from landfill:</b>	<b>12,250 lbs./year</b>
<b>Composting diverted from landfill:</b>	<b>83,200 lbs./ year</b>

**Key Program Elements**

**Benchmarking & Establishing Goals**

Paramount to the success of HopCat's Sustainability Program are the company's values of environmental and social responsibility, which are shared and adopted enthusiastically by employees.

A proactive approach is taken to ensure employees know how to manage materials. Appropriate signage and color-coded containers help employees know where to place specific materials. Containers are examined daily for contamination, which allows for timely correction of mistakes. Waste audits are used to explore alternative solutions to materials that are landfilled.

HopCat solicits feedback from their recycling and composting haulers to continually make improvements. For example, creative problem-solving led to the installation of a diapers-only bin in the guest restrooms, eliminating the problem of diaper contamination in the compost bin.

## CASE STUDY

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Even if recycling increases disposal costs, it may be offset by customer approval and loyalty.
- Inform your custodial crew about your program and ask how they can help make it successful.
- Work with your haulers to ensure containers are right-sized and collection is timed appropriately.
- Research alternatives for landfill items. HopCat replaced plastic picks put in their hamburgers with bamboo sticks so they could be composted.
- Employee buy-in is essential for the program's success.
- Share the impact of your waste diversion program with staff and guests.



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### Implementing a Recycling Program: A Step-by-Step Approach for Restaurants & Bars

1. **Enlist management and employee support.** Your employees will be a major factor in ensuring your program's success. Get them involved, informed and on-board early in the process.
2. **Find out what's in your trash.** Visit all areas of your restaurant and make a list of recyclables, organics and landfill items generated. Look for ways your restaurant could be reducing inputs or reusing materials.
3. **Determine indoor container and labeling needs.** Inventory your current containers and evaluate their usefulness. Every landfill container should have a recycling container next to it and each container should be labeled. Color-coded containers work best, making it easier for participants to quickly identify the right bin for their discards. The most effective labels have photo-images of acceptable materials, and are color-coded (blue=recycle, black=landfill, green=organics).
4. **Purchase labels and containers.** Purchase the appropriate containers and labels for the newly created program. Labels for the outdoor containers should be purchased, too. Recycle Across America labels ([www.recycleacrossamerica.org](http://www.recycleacrossamerica.org)) are endorsed by the Nebraska Recycling Council.
5. **Educate and motivate employees.** Regularly educate staff to share how your system works and answer any questions. Make recycling part of all new staff training.
6. **Evaluate your program.** You can't manage what you don't measure! Data is vital for promoting and adjusting your program. Work with all stakeholders to obtain diversion weights/volumes, to solve contamination issues, expand your program, and generate new ideas.

### Training and Green Teams

HopCat trains employees, not only on the internal processes of recycling and composting, but also on the environmental benefits and finished products. Employees have the opportunity to tour their local recycling and composting facilities, which increases employee buy-in and peer-to-peer accountability for the waste diversion program. Training is on-going and includes audit results and hauler feedback.

The formation of green teams is highly encouraged at all BarFly Ventures locations. Green teams make recommendations for environmental improvement programs and organize volunteer efforts in the community.

*Nebraska Recycling Council (NRC) is a statewide nonprofit organization supporting collaboration between communities, businesses, solid waste and recycling industries to improve recycling collection and infrastructure. NRC provides an online Nebraska Recycling Guide, recycling equipment grants, education and training, community and business waste assessments, green team training, and more. Visit [www.nrcne.org](http://www.nrcne.org) or call (402) 436-2384 for more information.*



NEBRASKA RECYCLING COUNCIL