

# ZERO WASTE BUSINESS PROFILE

## BENTO PICNIC

2600 E. Cesar Chavez | [bentopicnic.com](http://bentopicnic.com)



*"Zero waste for me means not generating waste in the first place."*

— Leanne Valenti, Owner  
Bento Picnic

### BACKGROUND

Bento Picnic helps people honor their commitments to health without sacrificing flavor, offering colorful, healthy and delicious meals.

Bento Picnic got its start through reuse when owner, Leanne Valenti purchased an entire kitchen from another business that was closing.

All meals enjoyed at their 2600 E Cesar Chavez restaurant are served with reusable dishes and all to-go orders are sent in compostable containers. Leanne has all sorts of tips and tricks for reusing leftovers such as making rice crackers out of leftover rice, folding salmon scraps into a dip, or pickling unused cut vegetables. "Rice is something you can compost, but if you can create something delicious out of it, even better."

### RESULTS

- Used Austin Resource Recovery's Zero Waste Business Rebate to switch from disposables to reusable dishes. (ROI after 60 uses).
- Creates value by selling new products made from leftovers.
- Achieved nearly 72% diversion rate by weight.
- Bento Picnic has the smallest commercial dumpster size available and has been able to reduce frequency of pick-ups.

### LESSONS LEARNED

#### Switching to reusable tableware has been 100 % win-win.

- The pressed bamboo plates and durable, reusable enamel mugs don't break when dropped—eliminating broken dish waste.
- Not having to keep track of single-use inventory means less work for our staff.
- Using sustainable materials for dishware enhanced the overall customer experience.

#### New employee training covers more than the menu.

- We ensure all staff learn proper methods of recycling, composting and strategies for reducing waste.
- Our experienced staff lead by example and help mentor new hires.

#### Be more of a numbers and metrics person.

- Set measurable goals and track progress. "The crunch factor is very important," whether you're talking about bento boxes, or crunching financials

#### The last experience is the thing you remember.

I don't want people's last impression being throwing everything in the trash.



Leftover rice makes delicious crackers

### AUSTIN RESOURCE RECOVERY

Free consulting services are available to help businesses reduce waste, increase diversion and meet or exceed the requirements of the Universal Recycling Ordinance (URO). Find more information and resources at [austintexas.gov/bizorganics](http://austintexas.gov/bizorganics) or contact us:

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