SINGLE-USE ITEMS

Reduction Strategy Guide

A checklist of best practices for building a strategy that's right for your foodservice business

Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

INTRODUCTION

From locally sourced ingredients to energy efficiency, sustainability is simply part of doing business in restaurants today. In fact, nine out of 10 respondents to Restaurants Canada's Restaurant Outlook Survey in Q3 of 2018 said they plan to continue or increase their current level of environmentally sustainable operations over the next three years.

Across Canada, restaurant owners, operators and staff are working hard to navigate the complex regulatory environment related to managing the day-to-day operations of their businesses. This includes balancing the need to reduce single-use items while meeting the needs of guests seeking increasing convenience and delivery options.

This guide provides information to support the development of a single-use item reduction strategy for your business. It provides you with the facts on single-use items and an overview of the related regulatory landscape, as well as strategies to reduce litter and engage your staff and your guests in this important initiative.

The checklist included in this guide provides direction on initiatives and best practices to reduce the use of single use items in your operations by following the environmental hierarchy of reduce, reuse and recycle.

While there is no one solution and each location will have its individual challenges and opportunities, the guide provides a range of options for restaurateurs and other foodservice operators seeking to build a single-use item reduction strategy.

THE FACTS ON SINGLE-USE ITEMS

The most recently published "Canada's Dirty Dozen" from the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup includes several single-use items that may be found in foodservice establishments. Plastic bottles, food wrappers, bottle caps, plastic bags, straws and beverage cans represented 23 per cent of the items collected, while the top two items — tiny plastic or foam and cigarette butts — accounted for 69 per cent of the items found cumulatively.

SOURCE
www.shorelinecleanup.ca/impact/facts

While waste from single-use items may be generated outside of foodservice establishments, restaurants recognize their impacts on the environment, public concerns and the need to show continued leadership.

Focus on Plastic Straws

Awareness around the environmental impact of plastic straws has recently become a major catalyst for change. Industry data indicates that approximately 4 million straws are used in Canadian foodservice establishments daily.

THE REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

As the impact of single-use items is increasingly documented and observed, there is mounting pressure for governments at all levels to act. The result in Canada has been a patchwork of by-laws and regulatory frameworks targeting these items with a focus on reducing dependency on plastics.

Policy tools and approaches range from voluntary to mandatory.

Voluntary initiatives include posting signage in restaurants and retail locations, encouraging guests to reduce waste, and developing optional waste reduction plans. Whereas mandatory by-laws and regulations may ban particular single-use items, such as polystyrene takeout containers, require businesses to offer on-site waste diversion collection programs, such as recycling, or imposing fees on the distribution of certain single-use items, such as plastic bags.

Appendix A highlights various government initiatives related to single-use items.

It is important to stay informed about local by-laws that may impact your business, as many jurisdictions are examining the issue of single-use items and determining their approach.

Federally, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) released their Strategy on Zero Plastic Waste, which includes a focus on single-use plastics. Specifically, the CCME has identified the need for improved results with respect to "the responsible use and recycling of single-use products", including shopping bags, straws, utensils, as well as beverage and take-out containers. The strategy acknowledges important functions these items play in today's society, while also recognizing the need to reduce their usage where and whenever possible.

This is a philosophy we can all align on — so let's start building your single-use item reduction strategy.

BUILDING A SINGLE-USE ITEM REDUCTION STRATEGY

As you set out to build your own single-use item reduction strategy, focusing on the benefits is a good place to start. This will ensure you have desired outcomes in mind as you plan for your strategy, review and select appropriate initiatives for your business, look at ways to reduce litter, and finally share your plan with stakeholders, including your team and guests.

Benefits of a Single-Use Item Reduction Strategy

Beyond the environmental benefits of a single-use item reduction strategy, additional benefits to your business may include:

- Reduced purchasing costs for single-use items
- Reduced costs of waste management services
- Improved brand reputation and community relations
- Increased guest loyalty and appeal to additional consumers

STEP #1: PLANNING FOR YOUR SINGLE-USE ITEM REDUCTION STRATEGY

Take Inventory

Taking stock is an important first step in strategy development. Knowing the type and quantity of single-use items in your establishment will help you identify the most appropriate and impactful actions your business should take.

This means taking inventory of all the single-use items in your restaurant — both in the back and front of house. Take note of the type of material each item is made of, such as the type of plastic, amount of post-consumer recycled content, etc.

Review Waste Management Services

Review your waste management service contracts and program requirements. This might help you identify opportunities for cost savings and/or increased diversion through improved recyclability and compostability of single-use items.

Track Progress

Having an inventory or baseline of single-use items and waste management costs at your establishment will also assist you in measuring progress towards your waste reduction goal, as well as quantify any cost savings being realized.

STEP #2: DEVELOPING YOUR SINGLE-USE ITEM REDUCTION STRATEGY

The following checklist will support you in building your own unique single-use item reduction strategy. It includes best practices and common approaches to reducing single-use items in the foodservice sector. While some suggestions will apply to all restaurants, others will be more relevant for certain business models than others.

Review the information provided and select the options most relevant to your business. Engaging your team for their input will be valuable at this stage.

The options below are ordered according to the environmental hierarchy of reduce, reuse and recycle. This is intended to help you focus on initiatives that may eliminate or reduce single-use items as the top priority.

Reduction Initiatives

Reduction initiatives implemented within your establishment will work toward eliminating or minimizing the use of single-use items. Reuse initiatives within your operations also contribute to this goal of elimination and reduction. Implementing any of the following actions will support your efforts in this area.

FRONT OF HOUSE:

- ☐ Eliminate any non-essential products like paper place mats or frilly toothpicks, as well as practices that add waste, such as placing two straws in a beverage.
- ☐ Explore opportunities with suppliers to reduce the weight of single-use packaging while still delivering on functionality.
- ☐ Ask customers if they need items such as cutlery, condiments and/or carry-out bags with their take-out orders.
- ☐ Consider the implementation of an "upon request" policy for straws.
- ☐ If needed, consider the use of a straw dispenser rather than using prewrapped straws.
- ☐ Ensure dispensers for straws and napkins are easy to use and encourage less waste or consider having staff distribute these items from behind the counter when requested/needed.
- ☐ Look into using condiment dispensers to reduce the number of individual packets used.
- ☐ Provide a thermos of creamer and jar of sugar at coffee stations instead of single-use packets.
- ☐ Ensure that reusable cups, plates, cutlery etc. are the default for dine-in customers if you already have these items available.
- ☐ Replace single-use items, such as cups and cutlery, with reusable items when serving dine-in customers.
- ☐ Use washable and reusable table linens.
- ☐ Increase recycled content in single-use items to reduce use of virgin materials while boosting demand for recycled materials and contributing to a circular economy.
- ☐ Work with suppliers to review opportunities for material substitutions that improve environmental outcomes — for example, switching beverage lids from polystyrene to polypropylene may reduce the environmental footprint of these items.

BACK OF HOUSE:

- ☐ Work with suppliers that utilize reusable shipping and storage containers.
- ☐ Purchase items in bulk and reduce incoming single-use packaging, particularly for condiments and non-perishable products, such as sugar and oil.
- ☐ Request products with a minimal amount of packaging from your suppliers.
- ☐ Use reusable cloth towels where possible rather than paper.
- ☐ Provide employees with reusable mugs and cups for beverages while at work.

Reuse Initiatives

In addition to the reuse initiatives that you can adopt for your own operations, there are reuse initiatives that encourage customers to bring in and use their own reusable items. Some reusable items from guests may not be suitable for use in your establishment for public health reasons. Consult your local health authority before implementing any of these initiatives.

- ☐ Consider discounts for guests bringing reusable containers such as travel mugs.
- ☐ Explore the opportunity to have customers bring their own containers, either for their order in its entirety or leftovers.
- ☐ Offer customers low-cost reusable containers and bags for purchase that can be used as part of a loyalty (discount) program.

Recycling and Composting Initiatives

Once you have considered and selected appropriate reduction and reuse initiatives for your business, review opportunities for diverting waste from landfill through recycling and composting.

To ensure acceptance in recycling and composting programs, it's imperative that you connect with your waste management service provider to confirm what goes where before making any changes to your single-use item purchasing strategy. It will also be valuable to connect with your local municipality to understand how any changes may impact their programs and how your customers may dispose of their single-use items at home.

- ☐ Review opportunities to implement back and front of house recycling and composting programs.
- ☐ Request supporting verification from your waste management service provider that they have been properly managed.
- ☐ Where possible, support public space recycling and work with local municipality on acceptable items for these programs.
- ☐ Collaborate with your local government to expand and improve recycling and composting services for foodservice packaging.
- ☐ Consider changing to single-use items that are accepted in your local waste diversion programs.

Plastic Alternatives

If you are considering whether to switch from conventional plastic to another material to reduce the environmental impact of your single-use items, there are a few things you need to know so that your efforts don't go to waste... literally.

If appropriate disposal methods are not used, alternatives to plastic will not actually help the environment.

Before making any changes, it is important to understand your options as well as what is needed to ensure that the change will have a positive impact. Here are some things to know:

- **Conventional Plastic:** Made from petrochemicals (a.k.a. fossil fuels)
- **Biodegradable:** Biodegradable plastics are made with petrochemicals just like conventional plastics. However, additives in these plastics allow them to decompose more quickly when exposed to light and oxygen as well as heat and moisture. While these plastics can be broken down into water, carbon dioxide and some bio-material there are concerns that they may leave behind a toxic residue and that could make them unacceptable for composting.

- **Bioplastics:** Bioplastics are made from natural substances, such as corn starch or vegetable fats/oils, rather than from petroleum. Bioplastics generally produce a relatively lower net increase in carbon dioxide gas when they break down. While bioplastics are often compostable some will only break down in an industrial composting facility which generates temperatures high enough to allow for effective decomposition. There is also concern that bioplastics may leave a toxic residue or result in smaller plastic particles.
- **Compostable:** Many people confuse biodegradable with compostable. While they are similar, biodegradable simply means the object can be biologically broken down, while compostable materials go one step further by providing the earth with nutrients once the material has completely broken down in the form of compost or humus. It is important to note there are differences between acceptable items from one compost facility to the next so even a "compostable" alternative may have its challenges.
- **Recycled Plastic:** Made from recycled plastics rather than virgin petrochemicals. In many cases as it relates to foodservice packaging this will include a certain percentage of recycled content in plastic packaging. The recycled content may be post-consumer (after use by consumers) or post-industrial (the recycling of materials from the manufacturing process). Post-consumer recycled content is viewed more positively as it creates demand for materials collected through residential recycling programs.

SOURCE

https://blog.restaurantscanada.org/index.php/2018/10/19/need-know-switching-to-biodegradable-plastic/ and https://www.explainthatstuff.com/bioplastics.html

Ask Before You Switch

Biodegradable plastics, bioplastics and compostable plastics are great options if they can and will be diverted from landfill.

There is no universal solution or method to properly dispose of plastic alternatives that will ensure better environmental outcomes. Practices differ from municipality to municipality, and waste hauler to waste hauler.

Before you make any change, work with your municipality and/or waste hauler manage to understand how these materials will be managed in their waste diversion programs or all the time, effort and money you spend may not have a positive effect on the environment.

Straw Alternatives

In instances where straws are still needed for your guests, there are some alternatives worth exploring. For example, there are glass straws and metal straws that may be used for dine-in customers or there are plastic alternatives for guests on-the go that include paper straws, biodegradable plastic straws (see box above), straw straws as well as edible straws.

Some alternatives may not be suitable for all guests, including those with disabilities. For example, certain guests may need straws that can be bent into position, which may not be possible with alternatives such as glass. Selecting the best alternatives for your business should allow for all guests to be included and accommodated.

As with any change, it is imperative to ensure that the functionality of the alternative is reviewed as well as what waste diversion programs may be needed to ensure they are properly managed after use.

We welcome you to refer to Appendix B for a list of suppliers that may be able to assist you in evaluating opportunities to introduce single-use item alternatives.

STEP 3:
INCLUDING INITIATIVES TO REDUCE LITTER

Include initiatives to reduce and manage litter while you are building your single-use item reduction strategy.

In addition to ensuring that the proper number of waste collection and diversion receptacles are available at the exterior of your restaurant and procedures in place for keeping the premises litter-free, you may wish to consider the following initiatives to reduce litter.

- ☐ Support local neighbourhood cleanups — this could include promoting the event, encouraging staff to participate in the event or providing refreshments to volunteers.
- ☐ Consider taking part in an "Adopt-a-Road", "Adopt-a-School," "Adopt-a-Highway" or other "Adopt-a-Spot" program.
- ☐ Initiate your own litter cleanup with an organization such as Pitch In Canada or the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup.
- ☐ Encourage other businesses to support litter-prevention activities.

STEP 4: SHARING YOUR SINGLE-USE ITEM REDUCTION STRATEGY

Once you have created your single-use item reduction strategy it's time to share it.

Your team, your guests, your local politicians and your fellow businesses are just some of the stakeholders that will be interested to learn of your strategy and all the work you are doing to reduce single-use items in your establishment.

Sharing your strategy and commitment to single-use item reduction can be a great marketing opportunity to differentiate your brand and enjoy increased business.

Restaurants Canada would also like to hear of your efforts, so don't forget to let us know too!

The Key to Success: Sharing your strategy is a great way to get your team and your guests engaged in the initiatives you are undertaking. Many of those initiatives will require their buy-in and participation in order to be successful.

SUMMARY

Restaurants Canada is committed to supporting you in your sustainability endeavours and will continue to update and build upon this guide.

Watch for more updates and get in touch with us with any questions, comments or experiences and best practices that you would like to share.

By creating your own unique single-use item reduction strategy with the help of the steps above, you will be joining a growing number of restaurants across the country that are embracing sustainable practices and future-ready operations.

Case Studies / Examples

NUBURGER'S TAKE-OUT PACKAGING IS RECYCLABLE OR COMPOSTABLE

Nuburger in Winnipeg is one of three Manitoban restaurants that have achieved a LEAF certification in recognition of their commitment to the environment and providing a sustainable dining experience.

All Nuburger take-out packaging is either recyclable or compostable and many products are locally sourced in an effort to reduce their carbon footprint.

A&W CANADA ELIMINATED PLASTIC STRAWS IN 2018

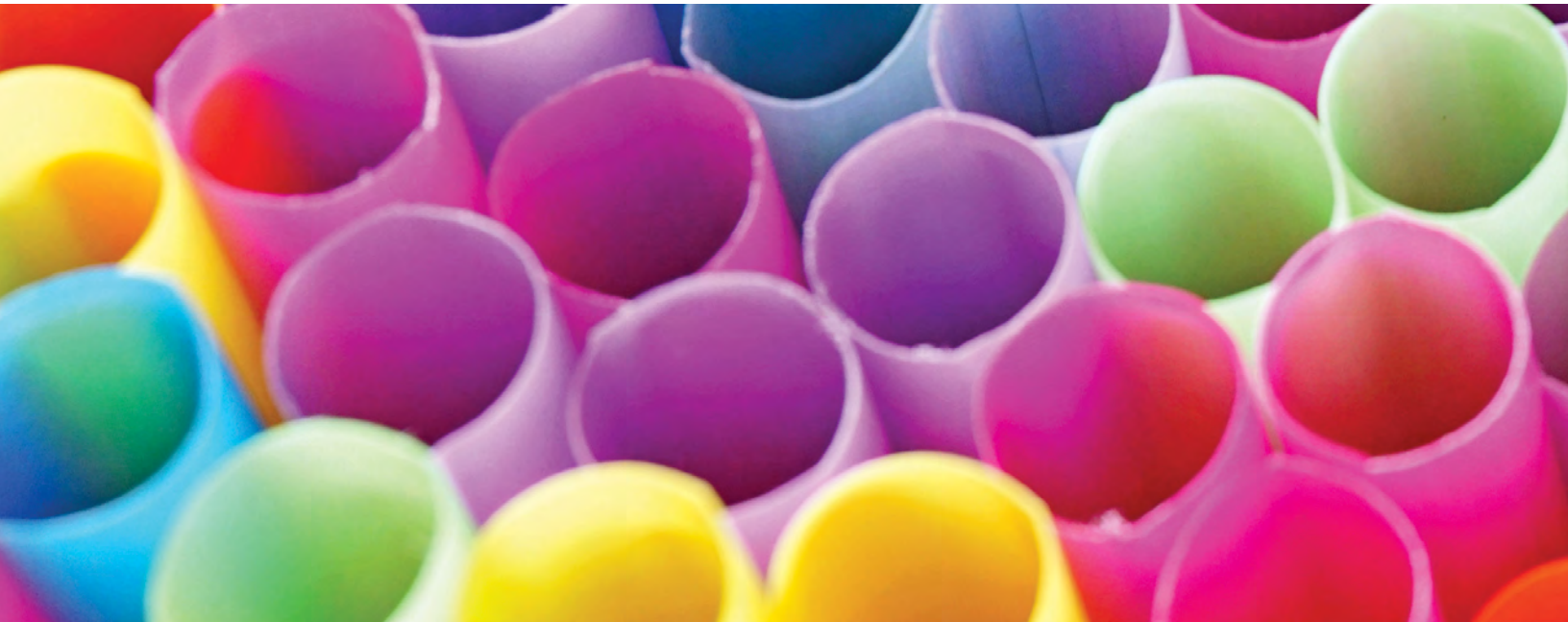
By the end of 2018, A&W Food Services of Canada Inc. eliminated plastic straws from their restaurants. They were the first quick-service restaurant chain in North America to make and deliver on this ambitious commitment. A&W now provides guests with the option of a paper straw. This commitment and change to a paper straw is projected to eliminate the use of 82 million plastic straws annually.

According to Susan Senecal, President and CEO:
Reducing waste from landfills is a top priority for A&W and this is one big way that we can make a difference. We are proud to make this change, which has been driven by the wishes of our guests, franchisees and staff.

According to Tyler Pronyk, Director of Distribution, Equipment & Packaging:
Introducing packaging innovations that reduce waste is key to A&W's environmental strategy. By using compostable packaging, real mugs, plates and cutlery, we are diverting millions of single-use packaging from landfills every year. Eliminating plastic straws is another big step for us. As we learn more about new tools and sustainable practices, we look forward to more improvements ahead.

THE COUP DRAWS EXCLUSIVELY UPON RECYCLABLE PRODUCTS

Calgary's The Coup recycles everything possible and utilizes paper products that contain post-consumer recycled content. They also ensure that everything that arrives to The Coup has minimal packaging.



Any food waste from the restaurant gets composted for their garden, which produces vegetables for their menu.

The Coup owners, Tabitha Archer and Dalia Kohen, are committed to offsetting the minimal amount of waste they produce by working through Tree-Canada to plant 36 trees every month.

EAST COAST CHEF ARDON MOFFORD HAS REDUCED STRAW USE IN HIS RESTAURANTS

Cape Breton restaurateur Ardon Mofford has reduced the use of plastic straws at his Maritime restaurants — Governor's Pub and Eatery and the Commoner Table and Tap. Plastic straws are only provided upon request, which diminished the total number of straws used while accommodating those guests in need of a straw.

To further jump-start his effort, Mofford has been challenging fellow Cape Breton restaurants and bars to take the same initiative.

> **According to Mofford himself:**
> My decision to reduce the use of plastic straws was motivated by the impact plastic is having on the environment. But also there was a practical reason — straws get into every sink pipe drain in the restaurant and eventually clog the drains, resulting in costly plumber visits. For the most part, this change has been received extremely well. A few customers get upset and we quickly respond with a straw to make them happy. Finally, what it has done now is opened up my eyes to how dependant we are on plastic in the foodservice industry, and the challenges we have moving forward to eliminate single-use wasteful plastic containers and bags.

RECIPE UNLIMITED PLANS TO ELIMINATE PLASTIC STRAWS FROM ITS ENTIRE RESTAURANT NETWORK

As part of a far-reaching strategy to reduce waste in all of its restaurants, Recipe Unlimited (formerly Cara Operations) intends to eliminate plastic straws across its deep, 19-brand network of eateries. Their goal is to offer paper straws exclusively by the end of March 2019.

Recipe Unlimited's brand network includes proprietary names like Swiss Chalet, Harvey's, East Side Mario's, New York Fries and St-Hubert.

Across its full-service restaurants, the paper straws will be granted only upon request.

> **According to Frank Hennessey, CEO:**
> Our goal is to enrich life in Canada — and that extends beyond our restaurants and guests, to our oceans, wildlife and environment. Straws are just one component of the work we're undertaking to eliminate single-use plastics from our supply chain and shift to recyclable or compostable materials wherever possible.

SUBWAY CANADA IS COMMITTED TO TRANSITIONING TO PAPER STRAWS IN EVERY CANADIAN LOCATION

Subway Canada has committed to transitioning to paper straws in all 3,200 of its restaurants in 2019.

The company is also working to ensure its restaurants and operations are as environmentally responsible as possible. This includes increasing recycled materials in its paper and plastic packaging and reducing its packaging's carbon impact through minimalist design and material choice based on sound science.

APPENDIX A

The Single-Use Item Regulatory Landscape

Below are highlights of current government initiatives related to single-use items.

LOCATION	SINGLE USE ITEM - VOLUNTARY AND MANDATORY INITIATIVES

Victoria, BC	• Mandatory ban on single-use plastic checkout bags, including biodegradable bags
	• Approved alternative bags include:
	  · Paper bags provided for a minimum charge of 15 cents per bag (increasing to 25 cents on July 1, 2019)
	  · Reusable bags for a minimum charge of $1 per bag (increasing to $2 on July 1, 2019)
	• Fees for alternative bags must be itemized on receipts
	• Exemptions include protecting prepared foods or bakery goods that are not pre-packaged

Vancouver, BC	• Single-use Item Reduction Strategy approved by council in May 2018 as part of the city's Zero Waste 2040 long-term plan • 2019-2020 initiatives include: **Paper and Plastic Bags / Disposable Cups** · Mandatory reduction plans for businesses for these items · Items to contain a minimum of 40% post-consumer content **Polystyrene Foam Cups and Take-Out Containers** · Beginning June 1, 2019 there will be a mandatory ban on prepared food in polystyrene foam cups and take-out containers as well as plastic straws **Take-out Containers** · Bring Your Own Container pilot in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health (launched in 2018) · Require a minimum of 40% post-consumer content **Straws and Utensils** · Plastic straw ban effective June 1, 2019
Wood Buffalo, AB (Fort MacMurray)	• Mandatory ban on single-use plastic bags that are less than 2.25 millimetres thick polyethylene, biodegradable bags, oxo-biodegradable plastic, PLA-starch, polylactide, or any other plastic resin composite that is intended to degrade at a faster rate than non-biodegradable plastic film • Exemptions: Restaurants, mobile catering companies and non-profit organizations, including food banks
Montreal, QC	• Mandatory ban on traditional plastic shopping bags that are less than 0.05 millimetres thick, oxo-degradable, oxo-fragmentable or biodegradable plastic bags • Exemptions include restaurants, dry-cleaning or bags that contain advertising and promotional material delivered to homes • Voluntary initiative to encourage charges for alternative bags offered
Prince Edward Island	• Mandatory province-wide ban on plastic checkout bags set to take effect July 1, 2019 via the province's Plastic Bag Reduction Act • Paper bag alternatives may be provided for a fee to the customer for a minimum 15 cent charge and reusable bags can be provide for a minimum of $1; these fees will increase to 25 cents and $2 respectively on Jan. 1, 2020 • Exemptions include protecting prepared foods or bakery goods that are not pre-packaged
Northwest Territories	• Mandatory 25 cent fee charge for every paper, plastic or biodegradable bag • Exemptions include bags used for unpackaged bulk items like produce, bakery and candy

Other jurisdictions that are currently reviewing their approach to single-use items include: Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta; Toronto, Ontario; and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

APPENDIX B

The following suppliers offer products that may be able to help you reduce single-use plastics as part of your reduction strategy.

- Galligreen - www.galligreen.com
- Green Circle Dine Ware - https://greencircleshop.ca
- World Centric - https://www.worldcentric.com
- Graphic Packaging International Canada - www.graphicpkg.com
- Discus Supply Co - www.discussupplyco.com
- Solpak - www.solpak.ca/en
- Fabri-Kal - www.fabri-kal.com/brands/greenware
- Greenovation Eco Dinnerware - www.ecopalmleaves.com
- Klover - www.kloversales.com
- Greenmunch - www.greenmunch.ca

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