



September 24, 2018

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
Board Chambers Room 107
Administration Building
651 Pine Street
Martinez, CA 94553

Re: Restaurant Food Packaging Ban: OPPOSE

Dear Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors,

On behalf of the California Restaurant Association (CRA), which represents food and beverage establishments in Contra Costa County, I would like to take this opportunity to respond to the proposal for a ban on polystyrene food packaging. We believe that imposing a ban on polystyrene will do little to reduce overall litter within the County of Contra Costa.

The restaurant community across the State of California continues to share concern about land and marine life by reducing their environmental impact as much as possible. Pollution is the responsibility of all county residents, as it is a serious issue. However, focusing on one product is a discriminatory approach, and has proven to be ineffective.

When litter is truly reduced, of course, the total amount of debris polluting our rivers, streams, and ocean is ultimately reduced as well. Litter abatement efforts should thus be comprehensive, specifically aimed at reducing all litter and not on one individual product. When that is achieved, all pollution harming marine wildlife and land ecosystems will reduce.

For example, in 2008 the City and County of San Francisco banned polystyrene containers. Following that, paper cup litter increased after this ban was enacted, as was reported in a later litter audit. Single product bans simply change the composition of litter instead of truly reducing it. For this reason, the CRA has long-supported packaging mandates requiring all food packaging to be recyclable or compostable, both avoiding discriminatory bans and improving environmental conditions.



Furthermore, polystyrene foam containers remain among the most effective for keeping foods fresh, leak-free, and most importantly keeping food hot or cold. That's why using polystyrene is still standard practice for many restaurants selling frozen food or drinks, as well as for restaurants that sell hot and soupy meals. Improper storage of food can cause the food to spoil due to an increase or decrease in temperature, which highly increases the risk of foodborne illnesses. It is for this reason that polystyrene is often still used for leftovers and frozen food or drinks.

The restaurant community is characterized by razor thin profit margins of about 5 cents on the dollar – in a sound economy. For this reason, cost has always been a significant factor in the consideration of a product on top of the functional value. Alternatives to polystyrene can double – or even triple – the cost of food packaging for local restaurants, and do not efficiently carry the food. Cost differences are felt differently by different sizes, types, and locations of restaurants and therefore have a differing impact on the local restaurant community.

The CRA continues to support the presence of recycling and composting programs to mitigate environmental impacts. To that end, the CRA has been working at both the state and local level to promote such programs. Less than one week ago, Governor Brown signed SB 1335 into law supported by the CRA. SB 1335 requires CalRecycle to establish a process and develop criteria for determining the types of food service packaging that can be used at state facilities. Under this bill, CalRecycle must maintain a list of these approved products, which they have determined are reusable, recyclable, or compostable. Importantly, this legislation reflects a material neutral approach to the issue of increasing the recovery of all food service packaging materials.

The CRA intends to be an active participant in the regulatory process working to help create a program that is informed and supported by scientific data, considers and reflects input and expertise from the food service packaging industry, food service providers, and other and ensures meaningful recovery of all food service packaging materials.

It is because of this that we believe that any effort to do so should be a comprehensive litter abatement policy instead of an attempt to ban a single product. Given the comprehensive precedent the new state law provides for food facilities on state property, we believe that Contra Costa County should abandon the pursuit of single product food packaging bans and, instead, embrace the spirit of SB 1335 and work towards its success and possible expansion.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact me at (650) 288-8235 or apiccoli@calrest.org.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison Piccoli". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alison Piccoli

Director, Local Government Affairs – Bay Area Region

California Restaurant Association