

CHIQUITA ROSITA'S REDUCING WASTE, ONE PLATE AT A TIME

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In 2023, Anastasia Jaramillo opened Chiquita Rosita's, a 900-square foot Mexican restaurant nestled in downtown Barstow along the iconic Route 66. This cozy, family-owned restaurant, employs 5 people (all family members), and seats up to 35 indoors and out.

Chiquita Rosita's carries forward a rich legacy of familial dedication, entrepreneurship, and community engagement that spans four generations and more than six decades. Anastasia's family operated Barstow's popular Rosita's Mexican restaurant from 1954 to 2021. When Rosita's closed in 2021, it paved the way for the next generation and Chiquita Rosita's was born.

Chiquita Rosita's embodies a tradition of waste reduction passed down through generations. By prioritizing the principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle, Chiquita Rosita's demonstrates how small changes can make a big impact, one plate at a time.

A FAMILY TRADITION OF WASTE REDUCTION

Anastasia's dedication to eco-friendly practices at Chiquita Rosita's is deeply rooted in her family's entrepreneurial legacy and her own sustainability ethos.

This ethos begins with a focus on food conservation, a tradition passed down through generations of her family. Anastasia's great-grandmother, Rosa Griego, originally owned a grocery market before transforming it into Rosita's Mexican restaurant. To ensure freshness and profitability, Rosa became adept at managing food inventory, setting a precedent for minimizing waste. This commitment to resourcefulness has been ingrained in Anastasia from a young age. "When you grow up in a restaurant and work in generational food service, you are very conscious of food waste and prevention," explains Anastasia. "Not only are you feeding customers as if they're family, overbuying and eventually throwing out otherwise usable food is both financially and environmentally irresponsible."



Rosa Griego in front of her market on Main St.

The principle of reduce, reuse, and recycle has been ingrained in Chiquita Rosita's family business for generations and is seamlessly integrated into their daily operations.

Just a month after opening, Anastasia seized an opportunity to reduce waste by switching from compostable plates and carbon-neutral silverware for dine-in guests to using washable plates, cups, and utensils. To-go orders, accounting for about 35% of their business, are packaged in reusable, recyclable, or compostable containers.



A dine-in Rellano Burrito plate.



To-go chips served in a reused brown bag. Staff urges guests to reuse salsa containers.

In the front of the house, Chiquita Rosita's utilizes brown paper bags and boxes from their bulk grocery orders for to-go orders, including their popular flour chips. Customers may occasionally receive orders in Stater Bros bags when the restaurant uses paper bags from personal grocery trips. Anastasia encourages reuse by having her children collect

and reuse cardboard cup holders from their coffee runs. Long-time loyal customers also contribute boxes, paper bags, and cup holders for reuse, and Anastasia actively encourages customers to return bags and boxes for reuse, noting their positive response to reusing items. In addition to paper products, Chiquita Rosita's uses washable and reusable containers for beans, rice, and large salsas encouraging customers to use them for food storage at home. Some regular take-out customers even bring their own bins or bags to pack up their orders, further reducing waste.

In the back of the house, they carefully manage inventory, avoiding overbuying and ensuring proper storage to prevent spoilage. In the unpredictable restaurant industry, they adjust by offering slow-moving items as discounted specials, minimizing waste while maintaining customer satisfaction. They purchase in bulk whenever possible to reduce packaging waste and lower costs for the restaurant.

As for recyclables, all bottles and cans are pulled out of internal recycling containers and given to an employee who recycles them on their own time for their California Redemption Value. All other recyclables that cannot be reused are placed in a shared, locked recycling bin for weekly collection by Burrtec.

SELF-HAULING FOOD SCRAPS FOR SB 1383 COMPLIANCE

In the City of Barstow, food service businesses must compost organics according to California's SB 1383 Short-Lived Climate Pollutant law. While many choose the City's curbside organics collection service, some opt for exemptions, allowing them to self-haul their organic waste. For Anastasia, obtaining an exemption was a deliberate choice inspired by her family's practice of donating restaurant food scraps to local farmers. Dennis, a local farmer who collected food scraps from her family's original restaurant, continues to pick up Chiquita Rosita's scraps to feed his animals.

Food scraps, along with plate scraps from front-of-house guests, are collected into lined five-gallon buckets located in the kitchen. Anastasia, typically found in the front of the house during operating hours, ensures every plate is scraped clean. When a compost bucket is full, the liner bag is tied off and the lid securely placed for pick-up.

With the restaurant open four days a week, food waste accumulates to about four or five five-gallon buckets per week. When cleaning the kitchen fryer, old grease is placed back in the original oil buckets for collection along with food scraps. The logistics of transporting compost to the farm are handled seamlessly as Dennis picks up the scraps directly from the restaurant on Friday nights, ensuring waste doesn't linger over the weekend. Regular collection, along with the restaurant's proximity to an animal clinic and the presence of stray cats, act as natural deterrents for pests.

A five-gallon compost bucket with both front-of-house and back-of-house food scraps.

