



## Committed to Cutting Out Waste: Bluegrass Restaurant

In the first of a series of local business spotlights, we sat down with Jim Lederer, conscientious citizen and owner of Bluegrass Restaurant in Highland Park, Illinois.

Bluegrass is known for serving up high-quality, all-American comfort food. They also have a lesser-known knack: being good stewards of the Earth. Over the last 5 years, Bluegrass has committed to reducing the amount of waste they create through recycling and more recently composting. Bluegrass was one of the first businesses in Lake County to start a compost program for collecting food waste.

**SWALCO:** What motivated you to start composting at Bluegrass?

Jim Lederer: What motivated me to begin composting was really we've been recycling for years. So the recycling program came out, and we figured out how to recycle. And as they introduced the composting, we figured we can do this too.

We weren't sure how it would work, but we decided to do the right thing for the right reasons. So we started that about two years ago and it's really worked out— extremely, simply, painlessly. And to our benefit.

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**S: How much have you been able to reduce your waste?**

JL: We had six yards, three times a week— down to two yards [three times] a week going to the landfill, in the last five years.

So we've gotten busier and we're sending less garbage to the landfill, which has worked out even better for everybody. [That's 66% less waste. Nice going, Bluegrass!]



**S: Any tips you can share with other restaurants looking to start composting?**

JL: So we had to first figure out [the containers], we got the big Slim Jims . . . and then figured out we're only filling them up about a third per shift.

So we eventually got rid of those and went back to just five-gallon buckets, and what restaurant doesn't have five-gallon buckets?! We dumped them each shift and it keeps it simple.

**S: What's been the financial impact of composting?**

JL: We've probably gone up a little bit in our costs because of recycling three days a week instead of one day a week. So we're paying about \$30 more a month to do the right thing. So yes, it's gone up a little bit, but at the same time, you've got to do the right thing to get the right thing back on the backside. So it's a very minor increment.

Here's the full SWALCO interview with follow composter and owner of Bluegrass Restaurant in Lake County, Jim Lederer. ([link](#))

