

Chipotle

Fast-casual restaurant chain Chipotle serves more than 1 million customers per day. Single-use gloves are a necessity for the business. In fact, about nine percent of the company’s total waste consists of plastic wrap and gloves. Previously, 95 percent of those gloves ended up in landfills, so the company was eager to find ways to address this waste issue.

By teaming up with Chipotle, we found a solution with an Arkansas-based startup specializing in plastics recycling. Together, a process was developed to convert the sterile polyethylene gloves used in Chipotle’s kitchen and food lines into PCRPro, a high-quality resin used to manufacture garbage can liners.

Joining forces, a mail-back pilot program began at 25 Chipotle locations. From April 2019 through December 2019, these restaurants recycled more than 625,000 gloves, with a plan to expand the program to all Chipotle locations. The company aims to divert 50 percent of its waste from landfills by 2020, compared to its 37 percent diversion rate at the end of 2016. Early results of the “Gloves to Bags” program show how reducing restaurant waste is one way foodservice can contribute to the circular economy. Most recently, the program even received a Shorty Social Good Award, which recognizes brands using communications, social and digital media to “positively impact people all over the world.”⁴⁶

