



# Down to Brass Tacks

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BRASS TACKS INITIATIVE



Taco Bien restaurant owners, Chris Meyer (left) and Daniel Garza (right), at a street festival in New Prague. Image courtesy Taco Bien.

## Business Spotlight: Taco Bien

LONSDALE-BASED RESTAURANT TACO BIEN HAS SUSTAINABILITY IN ITS DNA.

When business owners Daniel Garza and Chris Meyer opened Taco Bien in 2021, they decided that their restaurant model would be different from others right from the start. Besides satisfying taco cravings, Meyer and Garza were dedicated to making sure their business would be environmentally responsible, "I would only do it if it were sustainable - no food waste," Meyer said at a New Prague Chamber of Commerce luncheon in November, which Taco Bien catered.

Meyer is well-versed in food waste statistics and is ready to share the facts with anyone who will listen. "Food waste is a global issue but especially prevalent in the US," says Meyer. The USDA estimates that almost half of all food produced in the U.S. goes uneaten. This is due to several factors including spoilage, infestations, and culling. However, at Taco Bien, Chef Garza creates Spanish, Mexican, and Brazilian dishes using ingredients that many Americans normally wouldn't consider and that would typically go to waste. "By selling delicacies such as lenguas, menudo, sweet breads, pigs' feet, pigs' cheeks, etc. we are removing waste from the food ecosystem," says Meyer. "This is important because by reducing food waste - not only are we keeping things out of landfills, but we are actually making the cost of food and food services more affordable by capturing more calories out of each plant/animal."

Meyer and Garza didn't stop at reducing food waste. They took their sustainable restaurant model one step further by providing their customers with take-out containers, serveware, and bags that are all compostable. Clients with larger catered events receive elegant, pressed palm-leaf plates. *(continued on page 3)*

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## ***BTI News***

### **Funding Organics Recycling Education**

BTI was able to collect \$300 in donations during the 2022 annual campaign. The goal was to raise \$1,500 to cover the cost of supplies, printing, and the purchase of books to donate to local schools and libraries.

This is all part of an initiative to increase education about organics recycling in Scott County. As part of this initiative, BTI is creating take-home kits which will be available at no cost to families in June 2023.

The Scott County Library System will help distribute 1,000 kits as part of the Summer Spotlight Program. This way families can learn about organics recycling together at their own pace and in a fun way. "We want to make sure that families have the tools they need to make good decisions about their household organics," says Rachel Houck, BTI executive director. "What kids learn today impacts the future for all of us."

If you would like to help by volunteering or making a donation, contact Director Houck at [Rachel@thebrasstacks.org](mailto:Rachel@thebrasstacks.org).



*Child learning about composting with a DIY compost bin made from a recycled plastic bottle, 2022.*

## ***Funding Opportunities***

The following list of funding opportunities is provided for informational purposes only. The granting entities have no affiliation with BTI. For more information or to apply, please visit the granting entities' websites.

### **FEDERAL**

#### *Energy Audit and Renewable Energy Development Assistance*

Granting Entity: United State Department of Agriculture

Deadline: February 1, 2023

Funding: \$100,000 maximum

#### *Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)*

Granting Entity: United States Department of Agriculture

Deadline: February 28, 2023

Funding: No maximum. Smaller projects given higher priority

## BTI Business Spotlight: Taco Bien

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The plates are an attractive and eco-friendly alternative to plastic, more durable than disposable paper plates, and 100% compostable.

This commitment, however, didn't come without its challenges. According to Meyer, "It definitely slowed our launch by taking the time to study and learn as much about the food ecosystem as possible and what things we can't do based on our size of restaurant and to be compliant with MN health guidelines, etc." Despite the challenge, they pursued a sustainable restaurant model and still strive to use every part of the meat and produce that comes into the restaurant. Anything that cannot be used will either go to feed local livestock or be composted, "it never goes in the trash," says Meyer.

Taco Bien has now been in business for a little over a year and there are still challenges. According to Meyer, "it will always be a challenge to be a zero-food waste kitchen. Everything from taking the time to sort our 'waste' from prep to utilizing trimmings/fats to

making our own lard for other recipes - to scraping and sorting uneaten food from the restaurant. It's always a lot of work - but always worth it." It is so worth it in fact, that Meyer says he and Garza are looking into expanding Taco Bien into new facilities as well as sharing what they have learned with other restaurants to hopefully affect change in the industry.

***"Sustainability isn't just a catchphrase anymore. It's a viable business model..."***

To any business that wants to incorporate sustainability into their master plan Meyer says, "I think that it's imperative not just from a business perspective but from a social one as well to be focused on a sustainable business model. Sustainability isn't just a catchphrase anymore. It's a viable business model and one that simply makes a lot of sense. Sure, some aspects are maybe a little bit more expensive up front, but the juice is definitely worth the squeeze."

For more information about Taco Bien visit the company's website [www.tacobien.com](http://www.tacobien.com).



*Chef Daniel Garza at a local street fair. Image courtesy Taco Bien.*

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## ***About BTI***

The Brass Tacks Initiative is a 501c3 nonprofit founded on a mission to support sustainability in the food stream through research, education, and collaboration.

Our name comes from the phrase "let's get down to brass tacks." The phrase means to address the most important facts of a project or problem. The fact is food waste is a problem with environmental, economic, and social impacts. We believe the only way to make an impact on food waste is to **research** best practices and new methods of recycling, **collaborate** with the companies who are generating waste to find alternatives to the landfill, and make sure that current and future leaders are equipped with the **education** needed to make sustainable impacts in their community.

*For more information about BTI visit our website [www.thebrasstacks.org](http://www.thebrasstacks.org) or contact us via email at [info@thebrasstacks.org](mailto:info@thebrasstacks.org).*

