



# Research Spotlight

## Beyond Disposables: Eco-Clamshell Reusable To-Go Program

Concerned about the millions of disposable Styrofoam containers that end up in landfills after only one use, researchers at Eckerd College (Saint Petersburg, Florida), developed a reusable to-go system and container via a \$32,000 grant from the Environmental Research and Education Foundation (EREF). The project was led by Alison Ormsby, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies, and Audrey Copeland, Grant Research and Development Coordinator.



The initial prototype container for research use was created by G.E.T. Enterprises, a producer of fine quality melamine and plastic food service products. The prototype Eco-Clamshell was heat resistant, stackable, durable, had a hinged-lid and was made of BPA-free plastic.

In April of 2008 the first batch of Eco-Clamshells went into circulation at Eckerd College. Surveys conducted to gather student feedback found that while those participating in the program continued to use disposable containers on occasion, they were motivated to use the new containers because they were more environmentally friendly. Students also appreciated the sturdiness of the Eco-Clamshells. As the project progressed, the Eco-Clamshell program, including a handbook describing the implementation stages, was marketed to institutions across the country. The program has been adopted by more than 400 colleges/universities, including the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Virginia. The project findings show that not only does the program provide an environmentally friendly solution by minimizing food packaging waste - which is difficult to recycle, but it saves money.

Since the completion of the EREF-funded research project, G.E.T. Enterprises has continued to improve the design of the containers. Additional designs such as a soup container and a flat-top container have been developed and the containers are now 100% BPA free and leak-resistant. The Eco-Takeouts™ are being used at hundreds of colleges/universities, corporations and healthcare facilities through the world.

Syracuse University is one of the largest higher education users of the Eco-Takeouts™. Students who want to take a meal-to-go may take a container, and then used containers may be exchanged for clean ones that the school's food services department has washed and sanitized.





Henry Ford Village is a senior living community located in Southeast Michigan in the city of Dearborn. The facility uses Eco-Takeouts™ for its residents who can't leave their rooms to get their meals and need to have them delivered to their rooms. If the residents aren't hungry when their meals come, they simply store the containers in the refrigerator, and then when they're ready to eat they can heat their meal in the microwave-safe container.

Laura Weiss loves the convenience and variety of the downtown food carts in Portland, Oregon, but has always felt guilty using disposable single-serving containers. During a year-long stint at Aramark she learned of the Eco-Takeouts™ containers and was inspired to put together a business plan to introduce them to the food cart vendors through her [GO Box Program](#). Program subscribers simply download the GO Box app, visit a participating restaurant or food cart, enter a displayed code and show their confirmation screen to the vendor to get their food.

When finished, they return their empty GO Box to a drop site and use the app to scan the code on the drop box. All GO Box pickups and deliveries are done by bicycle and the boxes are sanitized in commercial kitchens before being delivered back to the food vendors. The program has 3300 individual subscribers, 80 vendors and 40 corporate program customers, and to date has eliminated over 115,000 disposable containers. The program has been licensed in the San Francisco bay area and is now looking to bring GO Box to other major metropolitan areas.



EREF is a 501(c)(3) class charity that fund and directs scientific research and educational initiatives for waste management practices to benefit industry participants and the communities they serve. The EREF allocates between \$0.5 and \$1 million annually in research grants and graduate level scholarships, with focus areas that include:

- Transport/Collection
- Policy/Economics
- Recycling/Waste Minimization
- Combustion/Waste-to-energy
- Equipment/Safety
- Conversion Technologies
- Life cycle inventory/analysis
- Landfills



**Environmental Research  
& Education Foundation**

*Lighting a path to sustainable waste management practices*

[www.erefndn.org](http://www.erefndn.org)