

Science · What on Earth?

## Reusable takeout options are popping up across Canada

Also: Beef is off the menu for some foodies

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(Sködt McNalty/CBC)

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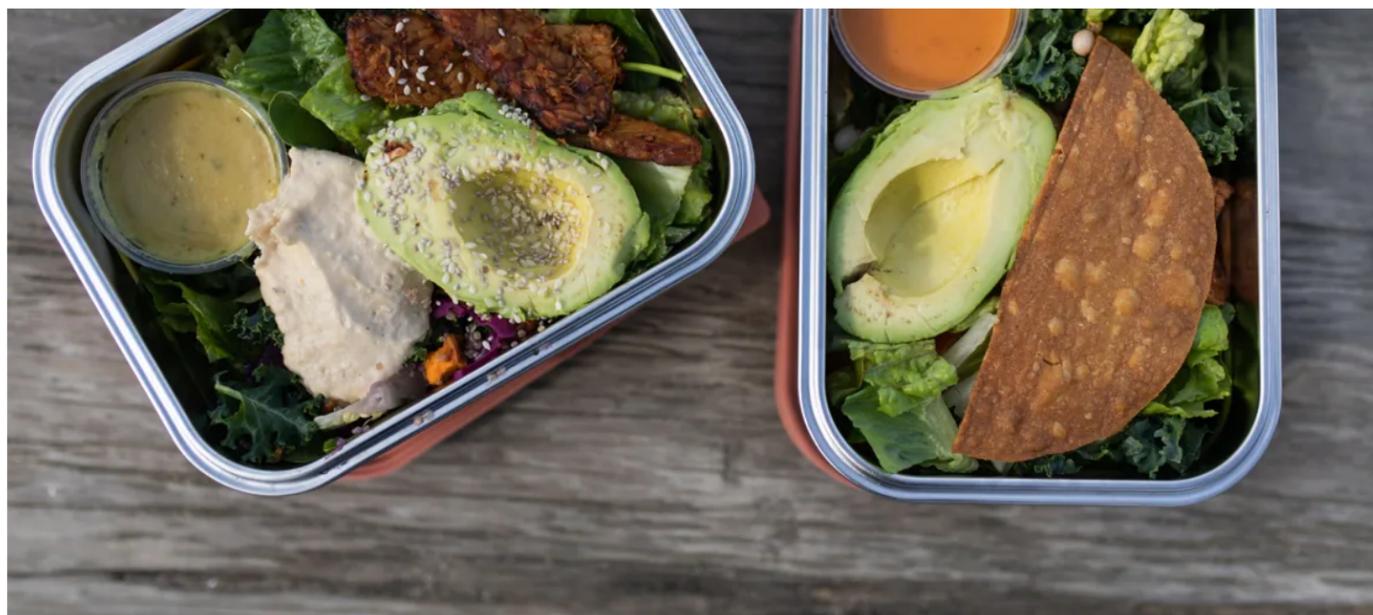
*Hello, Earthlings! This is our weekly newsletter on all things environmental, where we highlight trends and solutions that are moving us to a more sustainable world. ([Sign up here](#) to get it in your inbox every Thursday.)*

### This week:

- Reusable takeout containers are a popular pandemic trend
- Driving schools get charged up about electric vehicles
- Why beef is off the menu for some climate-conscious foodies

## Reusable takeout containers are a popular pandemic trend





(Reusables.com)

We've previously talked about the [waste that takeout generates and some of the potential solutions](#). Since the pandemic started, a lack of indoor dining has made takeout the only restaurant option in many places, and as a result, both the problems — and the solutions — have multiplied.

At least five new startups across Canada are hoping to eliminate waste by allowing you to order your meal in reusable, returnable containers. [A Friendlier Company](#) (in Guelph, Ont.), [Suppli](#) (Toronto), Ekko (Waterloo, Ont.) and [Reusables.com](#) (Vancouver) are already serving restaurants and customers, while [Re-Vita](#) (Edmonton) is getting ready to launch.

**Why now?** The pandemic might not be an obvious time to launch new services for the struggling restaurant industry. But many people have started ordering more takeout and feel guilty about the waste, said Anastasia Kiku, co-founder of Reusables (whose wares are shown in the photo above). "We just wanted to solve this problem," she said.

Also, in October, the federal government announced it would [ban "hard-to-recycle" single-use plastic food takeout containers](#), such as black plastic and polystyrene. Kiku and the others say reusables are the best solution.

Jacquie Hutchings, co-founder and chief operating officer of A Friendlier Company, said the pandemic has also forced people to get used to change. "Now is the time to implement a new system," she said. "Just offer it as an option and see what happens."

**What kind of container:** In most cases, the food comes in stainless steel containers. Crystal Kruis, who co-founded Ekko with her daughter Chloe, said metal is more durable and is what customers said they wanted.

The exception is A Friendlier Company, which uses polypropylene plastic containers. The company says the containers are light, stackable and their low cost reduces fees (it's the only service that's free for customers).

**How it works:** Suppli, Reusables.com and A Friendlier Company give customers the option to order through popular food delivery apps, although Suppli and Reusables.com require you to sign up through their app or website first, and you need leave a note about the use of reusable containers in the delivery instructions.

Suppli and Ekko have per-order fees ranging from 50 cents to \$2, while Reusables.com charges a \$5 monthly fee. A Friendlier Company doesn't charge customers for the service, although diners do have to pay a refundable deposit of 50 cents to \$1 per container.

Restaurants pay the companies a fee that includes the container rental, cleaning and restocking. Generally, the fee is designed to be comparable to what the restaurants are already paying for disposable containers.

The companies track their containers using QR codes or electronic ID tags to make sure they're returned to a participating restaurant or drop-off point within one to two weeks. Otherwise, customers get charged.

**How it's going:** So far, each company has between four and 30 participating restaurants.

Crystalle Kruis at Ekko said in the first two days after her company launched in April, the company replaced 231 takeout containers with reusables — roughly enough to stack up to the height of a four-storey building.

She said some customers told her they had been avoiding takeout because of the waste. Having a reusable option allowed them to resume supporting local restaurants.

Hutchings at A Friendlier Company, which launched in October, said some participating restaurants have switched completely to reusables and stopped offering customers disposable options at all.

— *Emily Chung*

## Reader feedback

"Thanks for [the story on banning short-haul flights](#)," writes **K Braun**. "Europe has such a good train network; the rise of companies like EasyJet and RyanAir that made it so cheap to fly those short hops across the continent supported a terrible trend to fly instead of taking the train. I hope more jurisdictions in Europe punish short-haul flights and incentivize train travel."

"And I'd love to see this come to Canada. Why are people flying between Montreal/Toronto/Ottawa? Take the train! Why isn't there a better train link between Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo? Why is there no high-speed train between Calgary and Edmonton? Canada was united by the train but it has been neglected in favour of the wasteful highway. I'd love to see train travel — as a genuine option for not only travel but also commuting — become a genuine option in Canada."

Write us at [whatonearth@cbc.ca](mailto:whatonearth@cbc.ca).

Old issues of What on Earth? [are right here](#).

**There's also a radio show and podcast! Mired. Bugged down. Swamped. You might not think much of wetlands, but it turns out they are one of nature's best climate solutions. This week, *What on Earth* host Laura Lynch**

squishes into the mucky ground. [What on Earth](#) airs Sunday at 12:30 p.m., 1 p.m. in Newfoundland. Subscribe on your favourite podcast app or hear it on demand at [CBC Listen](#).

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## The Big Picture: Electric vehicle driving schools

The dramatic rise of Tesla, along with pledges from legacy carmakers to produce fleets of zero-emission vehicles, have primed the driving public to believe that electric transport is the future. With that in mind, a number of jurisdictions in Canada have opened up [all-electric driving schools](#). As with most things to do with electric vehicles (EVs), Quebec is arguably furthest in front. The province's Transportation Ministry chipped in \$4.5 million toward a two-year pilot project called E-roule. Launched in 2020, it has so far facilitated funding for 30 driving schools to teach students in EVs. While E-roule estimates that its efforts have already saved 102 tonnes of CO2 emissions, its larger impact will likely be in helping produce a generation of drivers who may never handle a gas-powered vehicle.



(Guillaume Lavalée/AFP via Getty Images)

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## Hot and bothered: Provocative ideas from around the web

- **The World Steel Association says the industry is responsible for up to nine per cent of worldwide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels. Historically, metallurgical coal has been key in the manufacture of steel. But [Swedish steel maker SSAB is looking to clean hydrogen](#) as a way to make "fossil-fuel-free steel."**
- **Speaking of the Swedes, furniture giant Ikea has undertaken a number of steps over the years to reduce its environmental footprint. The company has talked about striving for a more circular mode of consumption, where its items are recycled or reused rather than simply discarded. To that end, Ikea stores in the U.K. will start a program that has been tested in Portugal and Australia, where they [buy back unwanted furniture items](#).**

## Why beef is off the menu for some climate-conscious foodies



(Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Growing up on a farm in southern Ontario, Toronto chef Ikeila Wright says she ate enough beef to last her a lifetime.

Back then, her parents grew crops and raised livestock. Now, she's the chef and owner at One Love Vegetarian, a Jamaican restaurant in Toronto that serves hearty dishes such as callaloo, a barbecue tofu stir fry, potato and chickpea rotis and a signature corn soup.

"What I eat, what I put on my plate, is personal. And I think for everyone it should be personal, but it also should be conscious," Wright said. "We have to think about future generations, because history will find us accountable for the choices that we make now."

Wright, who chose to become vegetarian for health and environmental reasons, is part of a growing number of people worried about the carbon footprint of meat — and beef in particular, which the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization estimates is responsible for [41 per cent](#) of all livestock emissions.

Last week, the U.S. food magazine and website Epicurious [announced](#) it was no longer publishing beef recipes because of how carbon-intensive the protein is.

In an explanatory [post](#), the magazine's editors cited statistics from the [World Resources Institute](#) that beef requires 20 times more land and makes 20 times more greenhouse gases than common plant proteins, such as beans. It is also three times more carbon-intensive than poultry and pork.

David Tamarkin, one of the co-authors of the post, [told](#) CBC Radio's *As It Happens* the "whole point" of a food publication like Epicurious "is to influence the way that people eat," he said.

Given it receives millions of users every month, "if we were successful in replacing one beef meal with one vegetarian meal a month, that is a huge win.

Because if everybody did that, that would make an enormous impact on the sustainability of our diets."

So how much beef do people need to cut down on to make an impact on greenhouse gas emissions?

Researcher Jim Dyer set out to answer this question in a [report last year](#) for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The study, aimed at the livestock industry, modelled scenarios where Canadians tweaked their meat consumption without reducing their overall protein intake or going fully vegetarian.

The modelling found that if red meat consumption dropped 25 per cent — in line with medical recommendations — and was one-quarter beef and three-quarters pork, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions from the livestock sector dropped 10.7 per cent. (The study assumed that any drop in red-meat consumption was replaced with chicken.)

Other analyses, including the [planetary health diet](#) published in [The Lancet in 2019](#), recommend cutting meat consumption down to just one serving of beef per week.

Dyer's paper did not model the impact of cutting out meat entirely from the Canadian diet and replacing it with plant-based proteins like pulses. But he said shifting to a vegan diet has an even greater impact on emissions.

"The first message was really quite simple, and that is: eat less beef," he said.

Typically, grass-fed beef — where cattle graze in a pasture — has been analyzed as higher in emissions than feedlot beef, in part because of land use. But many studies, including Dyer's, don't account for the other environmental benefits of grass-fed beef, such as the carbon sequestration in the grass and soil.

That can mean the higher emissions from grass-fed beef are offset by the carbon sequestered in the pasture, according to a [2018 study](#), although uncertainty remains about how much carbon is sequestered.

That's important for Cedric MacLeod, a grass-fed beef producer in New Brunswick. MacLeod and his family operate Local Valley Farm, where cattle roam free and feed on 40 hectares of strategically planted grass. The farm uses as little fertilizer as possible by planting specific types of grasses and using manure "very effectively," and runs on solar energy.

MacLeod, a soil scientist by training, said principles of sustainability are top of mind. "We do everything we can, certainly, to minimize our emissions."

MacLeod said that people should be concerned about where and how their food is raised, and be willing to pay for it.

"The chicken growers play a role. The potato growers play a role. The corn and soybean guys play a role. The cattle sector plays an important role, because we're managing the grassland," MacLeod said.

"We're all contributing to the sector's contribution to the fight against climate change."

— *Inayat Singh and Alice Hopton*

## Stay in touch!

Are there issues you'd like us to cover? Questions you want answered? Do you just want to share a kind word? We'd love to hear from you. Email us at [whatonearth@cbc.ca](mailto:whatonearth@cbc.ca).

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