

## 'It really is possible to be zero waste': the restaurant with no bin

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- What's the most memorable or meaningful meal you've ever eaten?
- How important is it for you to know where your food comes from?
- Some restaurants try to reduce food waste or use local ingredients. What do you think are the benefits and challenges of this approach?

#### 2 Key words

a. Match the words (1-20) with their definitions (a-t). Then find and highlight the words in the article.

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. composted _____        | a. a natural process where bacteria or yeast break down food or drink to preserve it or change its flavour (e.g. making kimchi, beer or yoghurt) |
| 2. decomposes _____       | b. a smooth, white, ceramic material used to make plates, cups or tiles  |
| 3. depleting _____        | c. breaks down naturally over time, especially organic material like food or plants  |
| 4. emit _____             | d. morally fair and right; treating people or the environment in a fair way  |
| 5. ethos _____            | e. very new and different; doing something that has never been done before   |
| 6. fermentation _____     | f. bending forward with your back rounded, often when concentrating or working   |
| 7. groundbreaking _____   | g. the beliefs or values of a person, group or organisation  |
| 8. hunched over _____     | h. watered using a system or method, especially for farming  |
| 9. irrigated _____        | i. a place where rubbish is buried underground as a way of disposal  |
| 10. just _____            | j. a close connection between two different things or groups where both benefit from the relationship  |
| 11. landfill _____        | k. birds that travel long distances from one place to another at different times of the year   |
| 12. malnourished _____    | l. turned into natural fertiliser by allowing food or plants to break down in a controlled way   |
| 13. migratory birds _____ |  |
| 14. negligence _____      |  |
| 15. porcelain _____       |  |

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- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 16. regenerative _____           | m. to reuse waste materials to create something better or more valuable than the original |
| 17. remnant _____                | n. to release or send out something, especially gas, light or heat                        |
| 18. symbiotic relationship _____ | o. not getting enough food or the right kind of food to stay healthy                      |
| 19. the pass _____               | p. in a restaurant kitchen, the area where dishes are placed when ready to be served      |
| 20. upcycle _____                | q. able to restore, renew or improve something – especially the environment or land       |
|                                  | r. using something so that there's less of it, especially natural resources               |
|                                  | s. the state of not taking care or paying attention, often causing harm or problems       |
|                                  | t. a small part or piece of something that is left over from the past                     |

#### b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

- \_\_\_\_\_ in a busy restaurant kitchen can be a hot and stressful place to work.
- The valley was once \_\_\_\_\_ by hand using ancient methods of channelling water.
- Our team is working on a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ solution to reduce food packaging waste.
- Instead of throwing away old furniture, why not \_\_\_\_\_ it and sell it online?
- That fashion brand's \_\_\_\_\_ is rooted in sustainability and having a low environmental impact.
- When organic matter \_\_\_\_\_ and breaks down, it produces a gas called methane.

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7. Millions of people around the world remain \_\_\_\_\_, even in food-rich countries.
8. Only a small \_\_\_\_\_ of this ancient forest still exists.
9. The \_\_\_\_\_ process popular in China and Japan enhances the flavour and prolongs the life of different fruits and vegetables.
10. Volcanic eruptions \_\_\_\_\_ toxic gases that affect global temperature.
11. Harry sat \_\_\_\_\_ his desk, desperately looking for some inspiration.
12. Most jurors believed the sentence was a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ punishment for the severity of the crime.
13. The wetlands of Northern Greece are home to several \_\_\_\_\_ each year, including flamingos and pelicans.
14. The farm employs modern \_\_\_\_\_ methods to improve the quality of the soil.
15. Structural damage to the building was due to \_\_\_\_\_ on the part of the contractor.
16. Handle the \_\_\_\_\_ plates with care as they can be easily chipped or broken.
17. The constant use of fossil fuels is \_\_\_\_\_ the Earth's natural resources.
18. All food scraps from the café are \_\_\_\_\_ and returned to the land.
19. In some oceans, crabs form a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ with corals by protecting them from predators and getting shelter in return.
20. Urban \_\_\_\_\_ sites give off large amounts of greenhouse gas.

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*Baldío in Mexico City is part of a new wave of restaurants embracing a regenerative ethos – with delicious results*

**Imogen Lepere**

**13 June, 2025**

- 1 Hunched over the pass in the open restaurant kitchen, a team of chefs are dusting ceviche with a powder made from lime skins that would, in most cases, have been thrown away. The Mexico City restaurant where they work looks like most restaurant kitchens but it lacks one key element: there is no bin.
- 2 Baldío was co-founded by brothers Lucio and Pablo Usobiaga and chef Doug McMaster, best known for his groundbreaking zero-waste spot Silo London. **"In my eyes**, bins are coffins for things that have been badly designed," says McMaster. "If there was a trophy for negligence, it would be bin-shaped."
- 3 The food, which recently earned a Michelin green star, is creative but still essentially Mexican. Significant planning is needed from sourcing to preparation, and the founders are also behind Arca Tierra, a regenerative agriculture project that includes a network of 50 farmers in central Mexico as well as the organisation's own farm in the pre-Aztec canal system at Xochimilco, an ancient neighbourhood in the south of Mexico City.
- 4 "Restaurants can have a big environmental impact but they also have **a big reach**," says Lucio Usobiaga. "We want Baldío to be a model that shows it's possible to be both zero waste and to rely on farmers rather than supermarkets."
- 5 Although the food is finished off in the restaurant's open kitchen, most preparation happens at La Baldega, a workshop where the team operates a fermentation programme that helps preserve ingredients as well as upcycle byproducts such as peel and fat. This includes pre-Hispanic Mexican drinks such as tepache and pulque, as well as koji fermentation – popular in Japan and China for thousands of years – to transform fish guts into sauce.
- 6 Globally, one-fifth of food is lost or wasted, according to the UN, equivalent to 1 billion meals a day, at a time when one in every nine people is malnourished. When food decomposes in landfill it releases methane, which has 25-times higher global warming potential than carbon dioxide.
- 7 Silo, when it opened in 2014, became the first restaurant in the world not to have a bin, raising the bar on what zero waste means. Less than 1 per cent of food is composted and no single-use materials are used. A dedicated pottery transforms glass into porcelain that is used for tableware, light fixtures and tiles.
- 8 Baldío is part of **a new wave of** restaurants that are moving beyond vague claims of sustainability to embrace a regenerative ethos. Baldío **goes one step further** through its symbiotic relationship with Xochimilco, the last remnant of the network of blue-green waterways that dazzled Spanish invaders when they arrived 500 years ago. The UNESCO heritage site is a key stopover for migratory birds and the only place where axolotls still live in the wild.
- 9 Although the unique ecosystem is severely threatened by urban sprawl, many Indigenous residents still farm *chinampas* (a pre-Aztec technique consisting of islands formed from trees, flowers and mud), gliding through the blue-green canals on canoes filled with lettuce, radish and *verdolagas* (Mexican parsley).
- 10 "In agriculture, how you go about production really determines how much carbon you emit," says Melanie Kolb, a researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.
- 11 As well as buying from five local families, Arca Tierra farms 18 *chinampas*. The farming team led by Sonia Tapia Garcés combines ancestral techniques with compost from Baldío's kitchen which contributes to the soil's potential for capturing and storing carbon.
- 12 The result is a crop that is irrigated with bio-filtered canal water and can be harvested 365 days a year without depleting the soil's nutrients. It is enough to supply half of Baldío's needs. The restaurant's chefs, who visit every Monday to plan that week's menus, have **a continuing dialogue** with the growers and often help with harvesting.
- 13 Ingredients are carried by boat to downtown Xochimilco and driven 8 kilometres to La Baldega. Reducing distance travelled and the need for refrigeration on longer journeys results in **a fraction of** the carbon emissions associated with typical restaurant supply chains.
- 14 For 74-year-old Noy Coquis Saldedo, who rents land to Arca Tierra, the project offers an opportunity to preserve his identity at a time when just 2.5 per cent of the *chinampas* are still used for traditional

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agriculture. "It's very sad that young people don't want to farm anymore," he says. "But now we are delivering food to the great city like my ancestors did."

- 15 For Lucio Usobiaga, closing the loop between the chinampas and Baldío could be a blueprint for the future. "Ultimately, I hope the project shows people that a more just and better food system is possible."
- 16 And the food? When the Guardian tasted it, it was delicious: flame-licked, spiked with salsas and texturally balanced, it is Mexican – yet also something entirely its own.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Choose the correct option based on the information in the article.

1. What does Doug McMaster mean when he says, 'bins are coffins for things that have been badly designed'?
  - a. Restaurants should use better quality food waste containers.
  - b. Poor design leads to unnecessary waste that ends up being thrown away.
  - c. Bins should be redesigned to look more aesthetically pleasing.
2. The phrase 'raising the bar' in the context of Silo restaurant means ...
  - a. installing higher counters in the kitchen.
  - b. increasing prices to cover sustainability costs.
  - c. setting new, higher standards for others to follow.
3. What is the primary purpose of La Baldega in Baldío's operation?
  - a. to serve as the main dining area for customers
  - b. to function as a fermentation and food preparation workshop
  - c. to store equipment and supplies for the restaurant
4. According to the text, what makes chinampas particularly sustainable?
  - a. They can be harvested year-round without depleting soil nutrients.
  - b. They require no human intervention once established.
  - c. They produce more food per square metre than any other farming method.
5. What percentage of Baldío's food needs does Arca Tierra's farming operation supply?
  - a. 25 per cent
  - b. 50 per cent
  - c. 75 per cent

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6. The phrase 'closing the loop' in Lucio Usobiaga's final quote refers to ...
  - a. completing the circular, sustainable system between farm and restaurant.
  - b. ending the partnership with local farmers.
  - c. finishing the construction of new facilities.
7. What does the article suggest about the cultural impact of Arca Tierra's work?
  - a. It's helping to preserve traditional Indigenous farming practices.
  - b. It's introducing completely new agricultural techniques to the area.
  - c. It's primarily focused on economic rather than cultural benefits.
8. The author's description of the food as 'distinctly Mexican – yet also something entirely its own' suggests ...
  - a. the restaurant serves traditional Mexican dishes without any modifications.
  - b. the cuisine is completely different from traditional Mexican food.
  - c. the food combines authentic Mexican flavours with innovative, unique approaches.

### 4 Key language

#### a. Match the expressions in bold in the article to these definitions.

1. doing more than what other people are doing in a similar situation  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. a very small amount or portion of something \_\_\_\_\_
3. from my point of view; in my opinion \_\_\_\_\_
4. an ongoing conversation or exchange of ideas between people, especially over time  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. a large audience; an extensive influence or impact \_\_\_\_\_
6. a recent trend or movement \_\_\_\_\_

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#### b. Complete the sentences with expressions from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. The new marketing campaign has \_\_\_\_\_, potentially influencing millions of consumers across multiple platforms.
2. \_\_\_\_\_, the company's decision to prioritise profit over environmental responsibility is fundamentally flawed.
3. The university's sustainability programme \_\_\_\_\_ by requiring all students to complete a carbon footprint assessment.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ tech entrepreneurs is focusing on developing solutions for climate change rather than just profit maximisation.
5. The innovative recycling process uses only \_\_\_\_\_ the energy required by traditional methods.
6. The research team maintains \_\_\_\_\_ with local communities to ensure their findings remain relevant and applicable.

### 5 Discussion

#### a. Discuss these questions.

- Do you think 'zero waste' is a realistic goal for most businesses?
- What role does consumer behaviour play in waste creation?
- How might the 'zero waste' philosophy be applied to other industries beyond hospitality?

### 6 In your own words

#### a. Work in small groups to create a proposal for a sustainable restaurant concept such as Baldío. Think about the answers to these questions before you start:

- What local traditional farming practices could your restaurant partner with?
- How would you go about implementing a zero waste system in your restaurant?
- What fraction of your ingredients could realistically be sourced locally?
- How would your concept go one step further than existing sustainable restaurants?



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Include the following details in your proposal:

#### A. Restaurant Concept

- Name, location and target market
- How your concept represents a new wave of sustainable dining

#### B. Sustainability Strategy

- Zero waste implementation plan
- How to cut down on environmental impact

#### C Cultural and Social Impact

- How to work with local communities
- Plans to build on existing traditional practices

b. Share your proposals with your classmates.