

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

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- What's the most memorable 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 advantages and disadvantages of this?

#### 2 Key words

a. Match the words (1-14) with their definitions (a-n). Then find and highlight the words in the article.

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. ancestors _____        | a. being the only one of its kind; special or different from everything else                   |
| 2. byproducts _____       | b. describing people or things that originally come from a particular place                    |
| 3. carbon emissions _____ | c. to keep something in its original state or protect it from damage or change                 |
| 4. coffins _____          | d. turned into natural fertiliser by allowing food or plants to break down in a controlled way |
| 5. composted _____        | e. people who start or create something, like a company or organisation                        |
| 6. crops _____            | f. the strong effect or influence something has  |
| 7. floating _____         | g. the steps and people involved in making and delivering a product                            |
| 8. founders _____         | h. a material or result that is made while making something else, often unwanted               |
| 9. impact _____           | i. people who enter a place by force to take control   |
| 10. indigenous _____      | j. staying on water or in the air without sinking  |
| 11. invaders _____        | k. gases released into the air when we burn fuel, especially from cars or factories            |
| 12. preserve _____        | l. plants like rice, wheat or vegetables that are grown by farmers for food                    |
| 13. supply chains _____   | m. boxes in which a dead person is placed before being buried                                  |
| 14. unique _____          | n. family members from a long time ago, such as great-great-grandparents                       |

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

1. This museum helps \_\_\_\_\_ the traditions of local people.
2. We \_\_\_\_\_ the apples from our apple tree with garden waste to make natural fertiliser.
3. The soldiers arrived like \_\_\_\_\_, taking over the city and changing it forever.
4. That delivery company has reduced its \_\_\_\_\_ by using electric vehicles.
5. Papa New Guinea is home to several \_\_\_\_\_ groups who speak their own languages.
6. Greg's \_\_\_\_\_ moved to this country over 100 years ago.
7. After the storm, pieces of wood could be seen \_\_\_\_\_ down the river.
8. Family members placed flowers on their loved one's \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Hannah is one of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the tech start-up.
10. Poor planning has had a big \_\_\_\_\_ on food production this year.
11. That species of pelican is \_\_\_\_\_ to the region and found nowhere else.
12. Many of the chemicals used are \_\_\_\_\_ of the manufacturing process.
13. Global \_\_\_\_\_ are often affected by weather and transport delays.
14. Farmers are busy planting their \_\_\_\_\_ before the rainy season.

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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 In an open restaurant kitchen, a team of chefs are using ingredients that, in most cases, would have been **thrown away**. The Mexico City restaurant where they work looks like most restaurant kitchens but it doesn't have one key item: a bin.
- 2 Baldío was started by brothers Lucio and Pablo Usobiaga and chef Doug McMaster. "**In my eyes**, bins are coffins for things that have been badly designed," says McMaster.
- 3 The food, which recently got a Michelin green star, is creative but still essentially Mexican. The founders are also behind Arca Tierra, an agriculture project that includes 50 farmers in central Mexico as well as the organisation's own farm in Xochimilco, an ancient neighbourhood in the south of Mexico City.
- 4 "Restaurants can have a big environmental impact," 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 programme that helps preserve ingredients as well as using byproducts such as fruit skins and animal fat.
- 6 Silo, McMaster's zero waste restaurant in London, became the first restaurant in the world not to have a bin. Less than 1 per cent of food is composted and no single-use materials are used. Baldío **goes one step further** through its relationship with Xochimilco, the network of blue-green canals that amazed Spanish invaders when they arrived 500 years ago. Although this unique ecosystem is **threatened by** the growing city, many Indigenous residents still farm chinampas (small floating islands made from trees, flowers and mud).
- 7 As well as buying from five local families, Arca Tierra farms 18 chinampas. The farming team led by Sonia Tapia Garcés combines compost from Baldío's kitchen with the soil. results are crops that can be harvested 365 days a year without affecting the produce. It is enough to supply half of Baldío's needs. The restaurant's chefs, who visit every Monday to plan that week's menus, often help with harvesting.
- 8 Ingredients are carried by boat to Xochimilco and driven 8 kilometres to La Baldega. Reducing the distance travelled and the need for refrigeration on longer journeys results in lower carbon emissions than those of typical restaurant supply chains.
- 9 For 74-year-old Noy Coquis Saldedo, the project allows him to farm his land at a time when just 2.5 per cent of the *chinampas* are still used for traditional 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."
- 10 For Lucio Usobiaga, the relationship between the chinampas and Baldío could be a plan for the future. "I hope the project shows people that a better food system is possible."
- 11 And the food? When the Guardian tasted it, it was delicious: Mexican – yet also something completely its own.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

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

1. What makes Baldío restaurant kitchen different from most restaurant kitchens?
  - a. It has an open design where customers can see the chefs.
  - b. It doesn't have a bin for throwing away food.
  - c. It only uses Mexican ingredients.
2. According to the text, what percentage of Baldío's food is supplied by its own farm?
  - a. 25 per cent
  - b. 50 per cent
  - c. 75 per cent
3. What are chinampas?
  - a. types of restaurants in Mexico City
  - b. traditional Mexican cooking methods
  - c. small pieces of farmland that sit on top of the water
4. Why does Baldío have lower carbon emissions than typical restaurants?
  - a. They reduce the distance food travels and need less refrigeration.
  - b. They use electric vehicles for all deliveries.
  - c. They only serve vegetarian food.
5. What does Noy Coquis Saldedo say about young people and farming?
  - a. They are very interested in traditional agriculture.
  - b. They prefer working in restaurants.
  - c. They are no longer keen on farming.

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6. What recognition did Baldío receive for its food?
  - a. Michelin green star
  - b. a zero-waste certificate
  - c. an award from Mexican farmers

#### 4 Key language

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

1. does more than what other people are doing in a similar situation \_\_\_\_\_
2. completed; given the final touches \_\_\_\_\_
3. from my point of view; in my opinion \_\_\_\_\_
4. put in the rubbish; discarded because no longer needed \_\_\_\_\_
5. in danger from something that could cause harm or damage \_\_\_\_\_
6. to depend on; to need something or someone for support \_\_\_\_\_

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

1. We \_\_\_\_\_ our smartphones to help us find our way around the city.
2. In some areas, wildlife is \_\_\_\_\_ pollution and deforestation.
3. This report \_\_\_\_\_ than just explaining the problem – it offers real solutions.
4. After the power cut, the family \_\_\_\_\_ eating their evening meal.
5. Thomas was upset when his old toys were \_\_\_\_\_ without asking.
6. \_\_\_\_\_, Sue's definitely the best person for the job.

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#### 5 Discussion

**a. Discuss these questions.**

- Do you think 'zero waste' is a good goal for most businesses? Why or why not?
- What role does consumer behaviour play in waste creation?

#### 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:**

- How would you go about implementing a zero waste system in your restaurant?
- What per cent of your ingredients could be found locally?
- How would your concept go one step further than other 'green' restaurants?

**Include the following details in your proposal:**

**A. Restaurant concept**

- Name, location and target market
- How your concept represents 'green' dining

**B. Sustainability strategy**

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

**C. Cultural and social impact**

- How to work with local communities
- Plans to build on traditional methods

**b. Share your proposals with your classmates.**