

CASE STUDY: Solving the Seamless Challenge

Lauterbach Group and
Great Plate Partner for Buc-ee's



Overview

When Great Plate, a family-run, U.S.-made brand known for its innovative snack-and-drink design, partnered with Buc-ee's to create a branded plate, they turned to Lauterbach Group for one of the most technically demanding parts of the project — the in-mold label.

The goal was to produce a food-safe, non-toxic plate with seamless branding, made entirely in the U.S.

That mission extended beyond manufacturing — it supported American jobs across a network of small businesses involved in material sourcing, printing, and molding.

What followed was a collaboration that tested — and proved — the strength of Lauterbach's innovation-first mindset.

The Challenge:

A project defined by precision and persistence

Flawless transparency: The clear label film had to vanish into the plate's yellow surface without visible edges or distortion.

Food-contact compliance: Every material — ink, film, laminate — had to meet FDA safety standards.

Static and curl control: If the film clung, curled, or doubled, the molded plate was unusable.

Perfect integration: The in-mold process had to fuse the label and plastic into one seamless piece.

In short: everything had to work — perfectly — the first time it hit the mold.



From Family Fix to Fan Fave

Great Plate began not in a factory — but in a family room. Founder Rick Kellow was watching his kids play video games in their home theater when the idea struck. Between the snacks and the spills, there had to be a better way to hold food and drinks together.

A friend made a prototype milled from resin — a one-off that cost an unexpected \$5,000 — and that early sample sat on a shelf for two years before inspiration hit again. Encouraged by his son, Rick decided to take the leap. He invested his own retirement savings — nearly half a million dollars — to bring the product to life.

Over time, the Great Plate evolved from a round plate to its now-iconic square design with a corner cup holder and even a slot for a wine stem. The product became a QVC sensation, selling \$17,000 worth of product per minute, and quickly became a go-to staple that fans pulled out for picnics, tailgates, and celebrations year after year.

When the company expanded into partnerships with major retailers like Walmart and Buc-ee's, Great Plate stayed true to its roots: U.S.-made, reusable, and 100% recyclable.

"We had to understand every layer – the film, the laminate, the molding process – and make them all work together. That's what we do best: we develop solutions."

— Heath Lauterbach,
COO



The Process

From trial to triumph: How Lauterbach Group engineered success

Lauterbach Group's team, led by Chief Operating Officer Heath Lauterbach and Director of Estimating & Financial Assets Don Sobush, dove into a full-scale R&D effort. The project evolved into a one-year exploration of materials, machinery, and methods.

Key Milestones

- **Collaborated with multiple U.S.-based film suppliers** to find the ideal film that balanced stiffness, clarity, and performance, and non-toxic safety requirements.
- **Re-engineered internal workflows:** HP digital printing → Flexo finishing to manage static and web tension with greater precision.
- **Conducted extensive test runs** – sometimes 500-5,000 units – with molding partner Pro Extrusion to validate performance in real production conditions.

The outcome wasn't luck – it was discipline, collaboration, and a refusal to settle until every variable aligned.

The Solution

Innovation through understanding

After months of fine-tuning, Lauterbach delivered a seamless, food-safe, non-toxic, 100% recyclable in-mold label that exceeded expectations for both clarity and performance.

The solution didn't just solve the immediate challenge – it expanded Lauterbach's technical capabilities. The learnings around static control, coefficient of friction, and film management now inform other product lines, from flexible packaging to pouching applications.

"Every challenge teaches us something new. We're not just printing labels – we're engineering solutions."

— Don Sobush,
Director of Estimating &
Financial Assets

"What impressed me most about Lauterbach Group was how they made a complex process feel simple. Every time we hit a wall, they found a way through. They didn't just print labels; they made our vision possible."

**— Rick Kellow,
Founder, Great Plate**



The Results

A partnership built on innovation

- Successful Buc-ee's product launch** — A durable, collectible plate loved by fans. Partnering with such an iconic American brand also meant helping serve (pun intended) travelers across the country — from road trips to tailgates — with a proudly American-made product.
- Expanded technical expertise** — Applied lessons from in-mold labeling to other packaging innovations.
- Strengthened customer relationship** — Great Plate continues to collaborate with Lauterbach on new decorative and recyclable products.
- Sustainability in action** — 100% recyclable PET plates and labels, supporting U.S.-based manufacturing. And because Great Plate produces every component domestically, the impact extends across the country — supporting small businesses, manufacturing partners, and suppliers involved in every stage of production.

The Takeaway

Where others saw a printing project, Lauterbach saw a puzzle to solve.

Through persistence, technical rigor, and a spirit of collaboration, Lauterbach Group helped Great Plate bring a complex product to life — one that united sustainability, food safety, design, and manufacturing innovation.

This project is more than a case study. It's a testament to Lauterbach Group's belief that every challenge has a solution — and the expertise to find it.

"Anyone can print. What sets Lauterbach Group apart is our willingness to take on the hard problems — and our commitment to solving them the right way."

**— Shane Lauterbach,
President**

Have a packaging challenge others can't solve? Let's talk. Lauterbach Group brings technical expertise, persistence, and innovation to the projects that matter most.



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