

Auckland's New Food Bins: A Fiasco or a Success?

We don't often realise how major of a problem food waste is because we are all set in our own ways. It is not only a moral issue when "45% of child deaths worldwide are due to hunger and related causes" (Action Against Hunger, 2023, para 3) but due to food waste the environment is harmed, and the economies are negatively impacted. But one may ask, "What can I do?" The answer is, as Prometheus said, "Big things have small beginnings!"

Wasted food ends up in landfills which is harmful to the environment. The scraps cause global warming to worsen as they decompose in the absence of oxygen and release carbon dioxide and methane. Another problem is that the more food we waste, the more needs to be produced. This results in land getting deforested to grow food, despite having enough to feed everyone already. Experts say the value of food waste in New Zealand is around NZ\$ 3.1 billion annually (Uys, 2022). Shockingly, worldwide this number is one trillion US dollars every year (World Food Program USA, 2022). Wasting food also leads to malnutrition in multiple parts of the world and it can also put pressure on farmers and food producers.

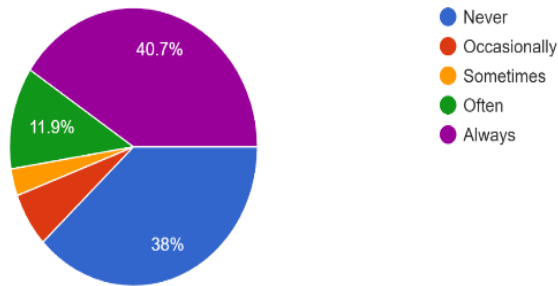
The introduction of food bins in Auckland is a big step towards reducing organic waste in landfills. Auckland Council's initiative to provide each household with a dedicated bin for food scraps shows the growing awareness and concern for sustainable waste management practices. By encouraging residents to separate their food remnants from general waste, the council aims to move a substantial amount of organic waste from food bins in Auckland. The scheme is being paid for by a specific charge that every homeowner must pay, which is currently \$77.20 annually per home because it is not yet supported by the council's normal operating budget (Auckland Council, 2023).

The food scraps are collected at points throughout Auckland and then transported to the Reporoa Ecogas plant, close to Rotorua. The plant, which is the biggest in New Zealand, has an anaerobic digester that allows bacteria to process waste in massive, enclosed vats without oxygen. It can process up to 75,000 tons of food scraps annually (Auckland Council, 2023).

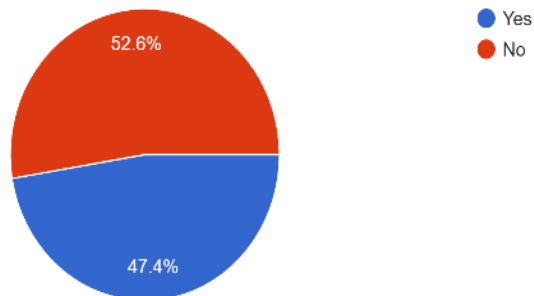
For this report, a survey was conducted online to find out the views of homeowners in West Auckland who have received food bins. A total of 413 people across a wide age range responded to the survey. It was interesting to find out that 38 percent of them have never used the bins. Out of them, little more than half of them do not even compost at home. This shows that this strategy to reduce food waste is not very efficient, however, to be fair some people

may still be getting used to the process and it may be too early to make a judgment about the success or failure of the initiative. Another surprising result was that 33.9 percent of the people were also unaware of the fee they pay for these bins, which shows how often people dismiss food waste-related topics.

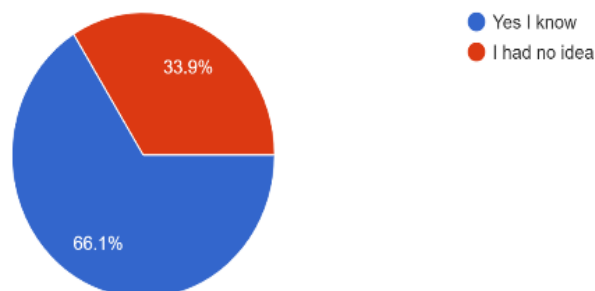
How often do you use the food scrap bins provided by Auckland Council?
413 responses



If you do not use the bin at all, do you compost at home?
287 responses



Do you know that Aucklanders pay \$77.20 per year for the food scraps bin whether they use it or not.
413 responses



Interviews with a handful of people about their personal opinions on the bins led to different points which hadn't crossed my mind before. Many people stated that the cost should be optional and 'user pay' due to many people not utilizing the bins, whereas others suggested the cost motivated them to make the most of the bins. On the funnier side, some people have found exciting ways to use the bins such as storage in the gaming room and ice buckets for beer. A large proportion of people are happy with the bin, but some are frustrated with the lack of consultation and the quality of the bin. We have all read the news about the 'flying bins' on Auckland streets, haven't we?

Many alternative solutions could be suggested to overcome this problem such as the government banning food waste or making other strict laws around it. For instance, France imposed a law in which grocery stores must donate edible food instead of throwing it in 2016 (Finedining Lovers, 2022). Not following this law results in paying a hefty fine and possibly going to jail, which stops people from wasting food. Solutions to food waste do not have to be so complicated and can include doing something as simple as educating others about the impacts of wasting food. Spreading awareness is one of the most effective ways to overcome any issue and give people the knowledge needed to make the right decisions.

The food wastage debacle is linked to Sustainable Development Goal 12- Ensure Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns- as food scraps are converted to clean energy and liquid fertilizer when taken from food bins which is a tremendous step towards achieving this goal. In addition, malnutrition caused by food waste correlates with Sustainable Development Goal Two- Zero Hunger. By reducing food waste both domestically and internationally and improving the effectiveness of our food production systems, we can free up resources for hungry people and mitigate starvation.

So next time you think about throwing away unfinished food remind yourself about all the people who are currently in poverty who can't afford to buy food, and remember, one simple action could make a huge difference. So, what are you waiting for? Go put your food bin to use! Tie it down if you need to so that it doesn't fly away but use it.

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