



Solid Waste Roadmap

Food Scraps Project Q&A: Businesses

Public benefits of a regional solid waste system

Through its management of the regional solid waste system, Metro seeks to:

- Protect people's health
- Protect the environment
- Get good value for the public's money
- Keep our commitment to the highest and best use of materials
- Be adaptable and responsive in managing materials
- Ensure services are available to all types of customers

About 40 percent of the food in the U.S. is wasted. That waste comes at all stages of the food system: at the farm, in transportation, at wholesalers and retailers, and at home. Despite our region's waste prevention and donation efforts, we still send to landfills the equivalent of 5,000 long-haul trucks full of nothing but food every year.

Why is Metro considering a food scraps collection requirement?

- Food is the largest component of our region's garbage. It is 18 percent of our overall disposed waste. Businesses are responsible for over half of that.
- Food waste has value. Collecting food scraps allows us to use that material to create clean energy as well as fertilizer and compost products that benefit local farms, nurseries and gardens. Putting food scraps in the garbage is a missed opportunity to capture these benefits and make the most of our waste.
- Sending food scraps to the landfill is also an environmental concern. Food scraps are a primary contributor to the production of methane in landfills. Methane has a greenhouse gas impact at least 24 times that of CO₂. Recovering just one quarter of our food waste is equivalent to removing 3,000 cars from the road or saving more than 1.6 million gallons of gasoline.
- This isn't just a local priority. The state of Oregon recently established a goal to recover 25 percent of our wasted food by 2020. In addition, the state recently amended recycling laws to encourage local governments to increase the recovery of food scraps.

Why focus on businesses?

- Businesses in the region throw away approximately 100,000 tons of food per year, which represents 55 percent of the total food that is disposed in the Metro region.
- A relatively small number of businesses can make a big difference. The majority of food scraps in the region are produced by about 2,700 businesses. Food scraps from businesses can also be more easily kept free of contaminants like plastics.
- Many businesses in the region have had the opportunity to collect food scraps for several years, but growth in collection has been slow. With a bigger and more predictable supply of food scraps, our region can secure private investment in a stable, local processing facility that can provide economic and environmental benefit to our region.

How many businesses currently participate?

- About 1,250 businesses of all types and sizes are currently recovering food scraps. This number includes businesses that may not be required to participate in the proposed required program due to their size or the fact that they are not food-oriented businesses (such as offices).

Shouldn't businesses donate food instead to feed the hungry?

- Yes, wherever possible. Good food that has been stored properly and is fit for consumption should be donated, and that is always the preference. Local governments can help businesses set up donation programs at the same time as food scrap recycling. Metro's proposed collection requirement is focused on food scraps that are not edible and cannot be donated such as trimmings, bones, shells, coffee grounds, food prep waste and plate scrapings.

How will this affect businesses?

- Businesses in the region are already required to have systems to recycle paper and plastic, metal and glass containers. This requirement would add food scraps to the list for businesses that process, cook or sell food.
- Businesses subject to a food scraps recycling requirement would receive technical assistance from their city or county to establish food scrap collection. Such assistance is already provided to hundreds of businesses a year for garbage reduction and recycling.

How many businesses will be affected?

- It is envisioned that if the mandatory food scraps collection program is adopted by the Metro Council, it will be phased in over a period of 4-5 years and likely affect about 2,700 businesses in the food industry within the Metro boundary.

How would businesses implement a requirement?

- Although this program does not add any new material to a business' existing garbage system, it would change how materials are collected indoors by staff and outside by garbage collectors. Some businesses may have to adjust container sizes, placement and collection frequency. Implementing a new collection practice is also an opportunity to make sure the collection service fits a business' needs. Some may identify opportunities to get more value or reduce the size of garbage containers.
- Any change to existing business practices requires some adjustment. Like recycling, the goal is to make collecting food scraps routine.
- On-site assistance will be provided by city and county recycling staff and garbage collectors to help businesses find the most efficient and effective approach. Assistance will be designed to help ease the transition to new food scraps collection practices through staff trainings, follow-up visits, problem-solving and resources such as signage and containers.
- Whether it is placed in garbage containers or stand-alone carts, food waste can cause odors and attract insects and rodents. City and county technical assistance teams have experience troubleshooting to prevent or mitigate these problems.

What will it cost?

- As with any new program, there will be associated costs for collecting, transporting and processing food waste. Metro Council directed staff to look at the financial implications and evaluate ways to minimize cost burden. Metro and local governments are evaluating the costs and how they might be reflected in collection fees. This is a challenging process that will take some time to complete and costs may change as the system matures and stabilizes.
- Metro will examine its role in controlling costs such as what is charged when food scraps are delivered to transfer stations, where the food scraps are delivered and the fees charged by the processing facility.

What do businesses think?

- In September 2016, a series of interviews and surveys were conducted with businesses in the region outside of Portland. Interviews included businesses currently participating in food scraps collection, businesses that previously participated but stopped, and those that were offered the service but declined it.
 - Nearly 45 percent of businesses were in favor of a mandatory collection program that had all businesses participating; 15 percent had no strong concerns and would comply if required; 30 percent had some concerns about how it would work but were not opposed; and 10 percent were opposed.
 - On-site assistance, containers and training materials provided by county and city staff were highly valued by participants.
 - Cost neutrality, space constraints, labor and concerns about cleanliness were biggest concerns for non-participants.
 - Most commonly, businesses said they wanted to reduce the garbage sent to the landfill and do something good for the environment. Saving money was not a priority, but keeping costs close to neutral was important.
- Metro staff is talking with food industry businesses, trade groups and local government partners to inform our planning process and design a system to best meet the needs of businesses and local governments. Our goal is to reduce the barriers and address the concerns of affected businesses while ensuring we can keep as much of this valuable material out of landfills and put to better use.

What kinds of products will get made from the food scraps collected and how will they be used?

- Depending on the technology used to process our food scraps, products could include electricity, vehicle fuel, natural gas, liquid fertilizer, solid fertilizer and compost. Most of these products are of value to many industries including agriculture, construction, vehicle fleets and utilities. In addition, fertilizers and composts produced from food scraps can promote soil health, prevent erosion, and increase crop yields and productivity, supporting our agricultural economy.

Do other communities have mandatory programs like the one being proposed?

- Yes. Six states and 13 municipalities have some sort of mandatory food scraps collection program or a ban on the disposal of food in the landfill. We have learned a lot from studying these other programs. Aside from the environmental benefits, many programs have also seen other positive trends such as increased donations of good food to food banks.

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