

Para Kai – Miramar Food Waste Diversion Trial 2021/2022

Lessons learned from participant surveys

The Para Kai Trial provided an opportunity to explore the effectiveness of composting versus weekly food waste collection for diverting residential food waste from landfill.

The trial involved 950 households in Miramar Peninsula. In total, 500 of the households had a weekly kerbside food waste collection, and 450 households were provided with a free compost bin, worm farm or bokashi system.

As part of the trial, participants were surveyed prior to, and during the trial. The survey responses provide some valuable insights for both composting systems and the weekly collection service. These insights have been summarised below and will be helpful for anyone considering rolling-out composting incentives or food waste collections.

Please note - for full details, refer to the associated Trial Audit Report and the Survey Report.

Composting systems (compost bins, worm farms and bokashi systems)

Many participants who asked to trial a home composting system enjoyed the experience. However, through the survey, some have identified the challenges which impacted on the ongoing use of their chosen system.

Information needs:

- Households require clear and easy-to-follow information to help them choose the best composting system for their situation ie. bokashi system, worm farm, or compost bin.
- Figuring out the best placement of the composting system is important. Getting wet, muddy or scratched by vegetation when taking food scraps to the compost bin impacted on use of the bin.
- Clear information needs to be provided on how the composting system works, what you need to do to keep it healthy, what to do when the bin is full, and any other composting troubleshooting tips.
- Informational workshops and videos are well received and considered helpful by participants.
- Information sheets in a handy format for what can and can't go into composting systems are important. (eg. A5 sheet with fridge magnet attached).
- There is a need to provide information on where people can access adequate brown organic waste in urban environments to allow compost bins to function. (eg. coffee chaff, dried out grass clippings, ripped-up dampened cardboard).
- Information needs to be provided about the good and not-so-good bugs that can be found in composting systems and what can be done to control the not-so-good ones. This could also help with the 'ick' factor some people found when managing their food scraps.

Materials and operational needs:

- Compost bins should allow access to completed compost – either through door at bottom of the bin or having two compartments/bins for composting.

- People are concerned about attracting rodents (particular in Miramar which has a strong predator free movement) – so it is important to provide information or materials to make composting systems pest-proof.
- Having to buy Bokashi Zing (a sprinkle which starts the compost fermentation process) on an ongoing basis was seen as a negative by some participants.

Food waste collection

Overall, people found food collection to be more convenient method than composting systems. They loved the flexibility in the types of food waste which could be included compared to the home composting systems.

Information needs:

- Information needs to be really clear about what can and what can't go in the bin – the high-level fridge sheet is useful, but a more detailed list could be helpful to avoid confusion eg. can teabags and paper bags go in the bin?
- There is a need to provide information about the best ways to keep bins clean.
- People would like to know what happens to the collected food scraps (and rubbish/recycling in general). How the scraps get composted and what the final product looks like.
- When running a trial – organisers need to be clear about end date and set clear expectations.
- Participants need to know what to do when collections are missed or when bins need replacing. This may require targeted comms.

Materials and operational needs:

- In summer, the bin may smell after a week, therefore methods to reduce the smell or increase frequency of collection should be considered.
- There is a preference for liners to help with 'ick' factor and reduce cleaning.
- Consider providing bench sized caddy for people to leave on kitchen benches. People may want to be able to put garden waste into the bin as well.
- The 23-litre bin size is generally a good size. However, the possibility of a smaller one for smaller households or two for bigger households should be considered.
- Bins need to be robust to prevent the handle breaking or the bin blowing away in the wind.
- Consider a foot pedal and better lid shutting/handle mechanism for the bins. When lids don't close properly it can result in odour, flies and maggots.
- Consider where information stickers are placed. If placed on the underside of the bin lid it will go mouldy very quickly. It's worth investigating if there is a better way to include this information.