

Case study: FOGO collection in Bega Valley Shire



Gardening Australia's Costa Georgiadis helped launch the new FOGO service.

“We have a great community here and most people understand how important it is that we reduce the amount of waste we produce and ensure that we recycle as much as possible.”

Toby Browne

Waste Services Manager,
Bega Valley Shire Council

Fun FOGO campaign drives amazing community results

A clever education program gets Bega Valley residents FOGOified

The education campaign that supported Bega Valley Shire Council's move to a FOGO (food organics and garden organics) service in October 2018 resulted in an enthused, supportive and engaged community and a contamination rate of less than half of one percent.

With the tagline *WTF - Waste ... The Facts*, the campaign had the dual impact of attracting attention and informing the community on the do's and don'ts to ensure the success of the FOGO service.

Bega Valley Shire Council's FOGO project manager, Joley Vidau, said the education campaign used humour and fun to engage the community.

“We developed a campaign that connected with our local community. It's a relaxed, good-humoured region and we tapped into that well before FOGO started to carry us through this change.

Waste Less, Recycle More

The new FOGO services were supported with two grants totalling \$641,400 through the NSW Environment Protection Authority's Waste Less, Recycle More Organics Collections program. The grants covered the costs of kitchen caddies and education.

"We understand change is difficult and that not everyone would be happy, but we wanted people to know why it was essential that we do something significant to divert (waste) from landfill. We also knew that we couldn't do it alone - we needed our community to come with us. Developing open, transparent relationships underpins *Waste... The Facts* and sets the scene for how we communicate both now and into the future."

The new service

The changes involved adding food to green (organics) bins provided to 13,000 urban households and collecting them every week (instead of monthly), changing red (landfill) bin collection from weekly to fortnightly and introducing FOGO collections for multi-unit dwellings. Education and engagement with the tourism sector ensured the region's holiday visitors also knew what to do.

Figure 1: Changes to Bega Valley Shire's kerbside bin collection service



Bin audits before the introduction of FOGO showed food and garden waste made up 40% of the weight in the red-lid bin going to landfill.

"This accounted for a minimum of 1000 tonnes of organic waste that we could be recovering and processing into compost at our newly upgraded Merimbula facility," Joley said.

"It's a great move because it saves this resource from ending in landfill, results in a valuable resource [compost] and gives us all an opportunity to be smarter with our waste. Our goal with FOGO was to divert 1000 tonnes a year, but we are on track in our first year to divert around 4000 tonnes. That has far exceeded our expectations and tells us that we are definitely on the right path."

The WTF campaign

The education program included the production of '*The FOGOmentary*' - a 30-minute documentary featuring more than 50 local school children explaining what could go in the new bins.

It featured *Gardening Australia* host Costa Georgiadis highlighting what needed to change and was premiered at a red carpet event attended by 500 people. The *FOGOmentary* laid the foundation for an accompanying TV and social media campaign, featuring the region's children.



A FOGO education brochure for local holiday managers.

This email is to let you know how delighted my group was when we stayed in Eden and discovered the FOGO system in our holiday unit.

Well done to Bega Valley Shire Council for this initiative! It meant that after a five-day stay in Eden, we had very little waste for landfill.

I hope my council in Victoria takes it up as well.

It would be good to extend this comprehensive waste system to the Whale Festival.

Yarram, Victoria

The *WTF: Waste the Facts* Facebook page provided information about the change to FOGO, maintaining the upbeat, positive tone. Residents embraced the page and local FOGO champions answered questions from their community.

Information was also distributed via a dedicated FOGO webpage and the existing Bega Valley Waste app, which was promoted with a highly successful ad campaign featuring the Bega Valley Mayor Kristy McBain running for the bin collection truck in her pyjamas. *Waste ... The Facts* also encouraged people to download the app to help them transition through the changes in their bin collections with FOGO.

Before the FOGO launch day, the council delivered kitchen caddies and compostable liners and an information brochure to 13,000 participating households. In the first four weeks a dedicated Green Team hotline number set up to respond to enquires received just 600 calls, a lot less than anticipated, with many simply wanting to know how to open the caddy liner bags.

“We attribute the low call volume to the multi-faceted education campaign reaching a broad cross-section of our community and having information-sharing tools like the waste app and *Waste... The Facts* Facebook page,” Joley said.

After the rollout, the council continued its community engagement with ongoing social media, connecting with special interest groups such as Rotary and schools and hosting activities such as Facebook live events with the Mayor, organics processing staff and other members of the waste and recycling team.

The results

Bega Valley Shire Council General Manager Leanne Barnes said the new service is resulting in some outstanding results.

“We had 27% less household waste going to landfill in the first six weeks and are getting among the lowest contamination rates in Australia,” Leanne said.

“The biggest risk to FOGO is contamination. In the first week the green bins had a one percent contamination rate, which dropped to 0.8 percent in the second week and 0.6 percent in week three.”

The compost made from the collected FOGO is being sold back to residents and is available at four locations in the area. The demand for the FOGO compost has been unprecedented, with supplies regularly selling out.

Tourism accommodation and education

During peak holiday times Bega Valley Shire Council's population triples from 31,950 residents to more than 95,000, which always adds pressure on the waste collection service. The tendency of holidaymakers is to throw their uneaten food in the red-lid bin at the end of their trip, rather than taking it home, which also adds considerable volumes to landfill.

Before the holiday period and start of the new service, the council hosted drop-in sessions for the region's accommodation managers in Bermagui, Eden, Tathra, Bega and Merimbula. In response to their feedback, an optional weekly red bin service was offered over the Christmas period for holiday rentals, which was taken up by 20% of accommodation providers.

“During peak tourism season the risk of contamination is much higher,” explained Joley. “We also get a lot of returning visitors and the summer after the rollout was the first time many of them had ever used FOGO.”

“The drop-in sessions were a good way for us to work with holiday accommodation managers to make people aware of the changes and reduce the contamination risk.”

Additional advertising and resources were developed for visitors, including inserts to holiday rental guides, corflute signs, bin stickers, fact sheets, fridge magnets, multi-language brochures and a targeted social media campaign. Resources were made available for download on the council's website on a page designed for holiday managers.

The EPA's Organics Collections Grants provide up to \$1.3 million to councils and business to introduce new food-only or food and garden collection services. They are administered by the NSW Environmental Trust.

Looking to the future

FOGO is part of Bega Valley Shire Council's 10-year Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy *Recycling the future*. The next stages include a community education campaign to help residents prevent food waste and a campaign to boost food donations from food businesses, supported by a \$177,070 EPA grant.

To capture commercial food waste, there are plans to extend the FOGO service to businesses, with an initial trial being conducted in Bermagui.

Many other businesses are taking it upon themselves to reduce what they contribute to landfill and the council is posting regular Business Brags on the *Waste...The Facts* page, which is further fostering the sense of community pride and 'can do' attitude within the Bega Valley.

Photos

Courtesy of Bega Valley Shire Council

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