



Commercial food scraps policy

February 2019

The values of a regional solid waste system

Through its stewardship of the greater Portland area's garbage and recycling system, Metro seeks to:

- Protect and restore the environment and promote health for all
- Conserve natural resources
- Advance environmental literacy
- Foster economic well-being for all communities
- Ensure operational resilience and adaptability
- Provide excellent service and equitable system access



Food is the largest component of our waste stream. Almost one-fifth of what we send to landfills is food where it decays and creates methane, a potent greenhouse gas. In 2018, the Metro Council adopted a businesses food scraps collection requirement to capture the benefits of turning that material into energy and useful products.

For more than 10 years, Metro and local communities have taken steps to keep food scraps out of landfills and put them to better use. Programs were established to enable businesses in some areas to voluntarily separate their food scraps from their other garbage and have them collected separately. Those food scraps are converted to compost and energy at facilities located 80 to 100 miles south of Portland.

Today about 1,400 businesses participate in this program voluntarily, but food scraps collection services are not available consistently throughout the greater Portland area, and a tremendous amount of food is sent to landfills. In July 2018, the Metro Council adopted a new policy requiring the largest food service businesses to separate their food scraps from other garbage starting in 2020, and smaller food service businesses will be phased into the policy over the following three years. The policy requires city and county governments, which oversee the collection of garbage and recycling, to take actions by July 31, 2019, to ensure that food scraps collection services are available to businesses in their communities starting in 2020.

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Why did the Metro Council adopt a food scraps collection requirement for businesses?

Food is the largest component of this region's garbage: about 18 percent of overall disposed waste. Businesses are responsible for more than half of that – approximately 100,000 tons of food per year – and food scraps collection services are not offered consistently for businesses throughout the greater Portland area.

Collecting food scraps allows that material to be used to create clean energy as well as compost products that benefit farms, nurseries and gardens. Putting food scraps in the garbage is a missed opportunity to capture these benefits and make the most of this material.

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 carbon dioxide.

This isn't just a local priority. The state of Oregon recently established a goal to recover 25 percent of food scraps by 2020. In addition, the Oregon Legislature recently amended recycling laws to encourage local governments to increase the recovery of food scraps.

Which businesses will be affected and how many?

This policy is focused on businesses and organizations that process, cook or sell food and generate large quantities of food scraps: restaurants, grocery stores, food manufacturers and processors, hospitals, hotels, nursing homes, colleges and universities, K-12 schools, catering, corporate cafeterias and others.

The quantity of food waste a business generates determines whether that business is subject to the policy and when it must begin separating its food scraps from its other garbage.

This policy will be phased in over a period of four years and affect about 3,000 businesses in the food industry in the greater Portland area.

How will this policy be implemented?

This policy will be implemented in three phases:

- Beginning on March 31, 2020, businesses that generate 1,000 pounds or more of food scraps (the equivalent of four 60-gallon roll carts) per week will be required to separate their food scraps for collection.
- Beginning on March 31, 2021, businesses that generate 500 pounds or more of food scraps (the equivalent of two 60-gallon roll carts) per week will be required to separate their food scraps for collection.
- Beginning on Sept. 30, 2022, businesses that generate 250 pounds or more of food scraps (the equivalent of one 60-gallon roll cart) per week, along with K-12 schools, will be required to separate their food scraps for collection.

Businesses that generate less than 250 pounds of food scraps per week will not be required to separate their food scraps from their garbage, but they may do so voluntarily.

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How will businesses implement a food scraps collection requirement?

This program will change how materials are separated and collected indoors by staff and outside by garbage haulers. Businesses 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 food service businesses.

Implementing a new collection practice presents an opportunity to make sure the collection service fits a business' needs. Some businesses may identify opportunities to reduce or prevent food waste, donate surplus food or reduce the size of garbage containers.

On-site assistance is provided by city and county recycling staff to help businesses find the most efficient and effective approach to reduce food waste. Food Waste Stops With Me (FoodWasteStopsWithMe.org) is a program that connects food service professionals with resources and technical assistance to prevent food waste, donate edible food and set up successful food scraps collection programs. The program is a collaboration between Metro, the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association, Oregon Food Bank, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, and city and county governments.

What will it cost?

Costs will vary by business and by community. Some businesses may see cost increases with the added service of food scraps collection. Some businesses may see no increase or find efficiencies by using smaller garbage containers or employing other waste prevention strategies.

In some communities food scraps collection services, like recycling, may be included in one combined solid waste rate. City and county governments may employ a variety of approaches for structuring their solid waste rates to include the added service of food scraps collection from businesses.

Metro is will also provide some garbage haulers with funds to mitigate increased costs of transporting food scraps so as to minimize the impacts on customers' rates.

What do businesses think?

In the three years leading up to the adoption of this regional policy, Metro staff met with food industry businesses, trade association leaders and local government partners to inform our planning process and design a system to best meet the needs of businesses and local governments.

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 government staff were highly valued by participants.
- Cost neutrality, space constraints, labor and concerns about cleanliness were biggest concerns for non-participants.

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- 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 sole consideration, but keeping costs close to neutral was important.

Do other communities have mandatory programs like the one the Metro Council adopted?

Yes. There are six states and 13 municipalities that have some sort of mandatory food scraps collection program or a ban on the disposal of food in a landfill. Metro 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.

Shouldn't businesses donate food instead?

Yes. Surplus food that has been stored properly and is fit for human consumption can be donated. However most food service businesses have other food scraps such as trimmings, bones, shells, coffee grounds, food preparation waste and plate scrapings that are not edible and cannot be donated. Those food scraps are the focus of Metro's policy.

The prevention of food waste and the donation of edible food are and will continue to be Metro's highest priority. FoodWasteStopsWithMe.org connects businesses with resources and technical assistance available through city and county recycling staff to help businesses prevent food waste, donate edible food and set up successful food scraps collection programs.

Are there adequate facilities to process the additional food scraps that will be collected from businesses?

Yes. Food scraps already collected from area businesses are transported to two compost facilities in the Willamette Valley. These facilities currently have sufficient capacity to manage the increased volumes of food scraps that are anticipated from the implementation of this policy. Metro will continue to pursue additional facilities closer to the greater Portland area that can convert food scraps into useful products.

What about residential food scraps collection?

The focus right now is on recovering those concentrated amounts of food scraps coming from businesses where the quantities of food scraps are the greatest. This does not detract from the importance of keeping more food scraps out of the landfill. Metro supports, but does not require, efforts of local communities to collect food scraps with yard debris from homes for composting.

Who can answer further questions about Metro's food scraps policy?

Please contact Pam Peck at pam.peck@oregonmetro.gov or Jennifer Erickson at jennifer.erickson@oregonmetro.gov if you have questions that are not addressed here. More information is also available on Metro's website at oregonmetro.gov/foodscraps.