

**Case study:
Food organics
and garden
organics
collection in the
Central West**



Photo: The new three-bin system rolling out in Parkes. (*Parkes Champion Post*)

Collective approach pays off

Three NSW Central West councils have successfully introduced a weekly food organics and garden organics (FOGO) waste service, diverting thousands of tonnes of organics from landfill.

Bathurst Regional Council and Forbes and Parkes Shire Council areas span 14,488 square kilometres and are home to around 66,500 people. These former gold rush towns are hubs for agriculture, livestock exchange and mining.

United by green change

After an audit found more than half the contents of their household red-lid bins was food and garden waste that could be recycled, Parkes Shire Council, Forbes Shire Council and Bathurst Regional Council combined forces to introduce weekly food and garden organics (FOGO) bins.

With funding support of more than \$1.4 million through the NSW Environment Protection Authority's Waste Less, Recycle More Organics Collections grants, the new services have diverted 6,700 tonnes of organics from landfill each year since they began in April 2016.

With no existing green-lid bin collection, and the red-lid bin only 60–75% full, the councils decided there was plenty of opportunity for change.

'If you can combine with other councils in the region, you get a better result for council, the ratepayer, everybody who is involved. You are actually able to facilitate a better service ... because with greater numbers the price drops for all sorts of things: the collection of material, the buying of the bins.'

Antony Cullen-Ward, Solid Waste Coordinator, Bathurst Regional Council

The new FOGO service was rolled out to 19,000 households, mostly single dwellings, rather than units; single dwellings account for two-thirds of households in the three council areas.

Some areas faced strong initial opposition from the community, but this quickly dropped off once the service was up and running and people started using it. A community survey a year down the track showed 87% of people had no problems using the new bins.

A joint approach

The three councils combined under the Netwaste regional group to invite tenders for a new waste and recycling collection contract, including the introduction of weekly FOGO bins.

Bathurst Council decided to continue with weekly red-lid bin collections because it knew residents might resist a change. Forbes and Parkes Councils reduced red-lid bin collections to fortnightly, hoping to motivate people to put more food waste in the new FOGO bins.

The waste collection contract was awarded to JR Richards and Sons with the FOGO waste processed into high-quality compost by Australian Native Landscapes (ANL) at its Browns Plain facility.

The councils each received an Organics Collections Grant. The grant funded the purchase of bins, which cost more than \$1 million alone, and kitchen caddies. It also funded community education, including before and after surveys of community attitudes and behaviour.

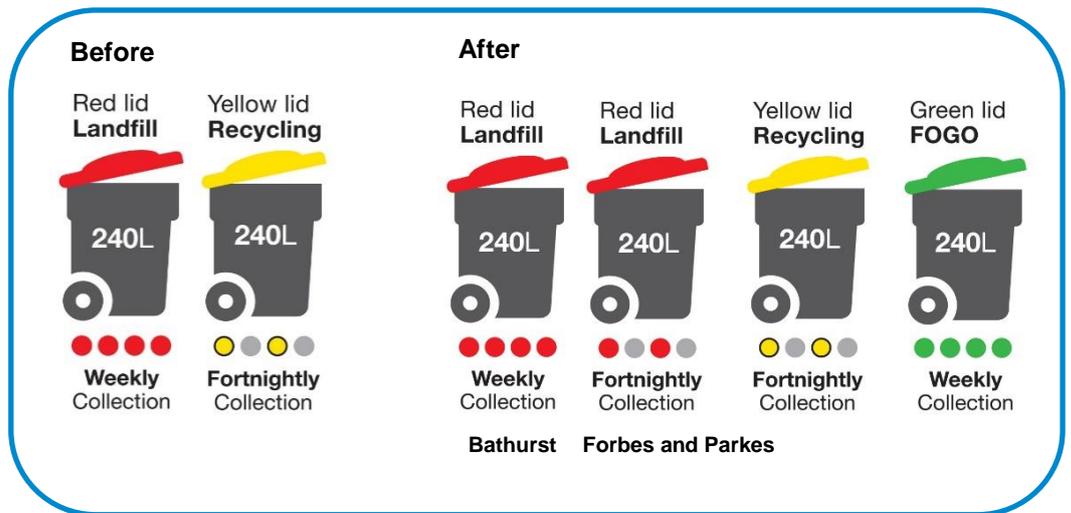


Figure: Changes to kerbside bin collection services in Parkes, Forbes and Bathurst Councils.

Green is for go

In 2015, online and telephone surveys of 950 residents of Bathurst, Forbes and Parkes showed 86% supported the councils collecting FOGO waste weekly for composting.

Education, largely contracted out to Envirocom, included information sessions for council staff and promotional messages delivered to the public via radio, newspapers and Facebook. The tag line was 'Green is for go'.

A red-lid bin audit in 2015 found half the bin content in Bathurst (54%) was food and garden waste. The recyclable content in Parkes was 51% and in Forbes 60%.

‘The EPA grant provided the incentive for council to jump into it now rather than leave it until a later contract.

‘It certainly made it easier for us to convince the council with these funds available to purchase the bins and caddies and for education.’

**Steven Campbell,
Director Planning
and Environment,
Parkes Shire Council**

In Bathurst, a few residents initially opposed the introduction of the FOGO bins. The main objections were a belief that FOGO bins were unnecessary, would cost more and that no bags were allowed, even for food waste.

A few residents even tried to sabotage the new service. ‘We had people throw needles into the [FOGO] bins, car batteries, clothes, all types of things,’ said Antony Cullen-Ward, Bathurst Regional Council’s Solid Waste Coordinator.

To counteract this, council ‘humanised the service’, explaining worker health and safety was at risk when they had to sort the contamination from the bins. The education campaign worked and opposition subsided.

‘When we initiated the service we went through a crazy period,’ Cullen-Ward said. ‘Anybody who wanted to complain did it in that four- to five-week period. That’s all calmed down now, which we knew it would. I haven’t received a direct complaint in two years.’

By contrast, in Parkes, the local newspaper was ‘very positive’ about the plan. ‘The main opposition we had was to the red-lid bin being reduced to fortnightly and not the organic service itself. But that disappeared very early in the process, once we had the service running,’ said Steven Campbell, Parkes Shire Council’s Director for Planning and Environment.

‘I think it’s been wholly successful and it’s been quite well received by the community.’



Photo: Bathurst landfill waste before the service was introduced. (Bathurst City Council)

Results and savings: Big drop in waste to landfill

Follow-up audits in 2017 found education, including the tag line ‘Green is for go’ resulted in low contamination rates, and very good garden waste recovery but lower than expected food recovery.

The FOGO bins contained an average of 11–12 kilograms of material weekly. In Bathurst this included 92% garden matter, 2% food, 4% cardboard and 1% contamination. The weekly red-lid bins still contained 49% food.

The Environment Protection Authority'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 Environmental Trust and open for applications over several funding rounds.

Forbes recorded 88% garden matter, 5% food and 6% paper and cardboard in the FOGO bins. The fortnightly red-lid bins had 31% compostable material – around half the previous amount. The total contents weighed 24% less.

In Parkes the FOGO bins included 95% garden matter, 1% food and 4% paper and cardboard.

Steven Campbell said in Parkes the gross total waste diverted from landfill increased from around 20% to 55%. The 55% consisted of 1632 tonnes (34%) of organics from green-lid bins and 980 tonnes (21%) of recyclables from yellow-lid bins.

There was still quite a lot of food waste in the remaining 2165 tonnes that could be diverted to landfill, accounting for 45% of the total waste stream.

'We find people here love their green bins. They love dragging them around their yards while doing the pruning and weeding,' Campbell said.

Looking forward

The three councils are encouraging residents to put more food waste into the FOGO bins.

'We just put the word out: use your green bins as much as possible, you are reducing waste to landfill, you are reducing greenhouse gases,' said Cullen-Ward.

NSW Environment Protection Authority
Email: info@epa.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au
ISBN 978 1 925790 28 3 | EPA 2018P0750
April 2018

The EPA [disclaimer](#) and [copyright](#) information is available on the EPA website.