

Contacts:

Lyn Mayes, The Packaging Forum
Phone 021 471 261; lynmayes@madworld.co.nz

Kim Renshaw, Beyond the Bin
Phone: 027 669 6955 kim@beyondthebin.org.nz



Press Release

New study recommends clear identification of coffee cups, product innovation and investment in compost facilities

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The Packaging Forum has released the findings of a detailed survey by specialist consultancy Beyond the Bin of 27 composting facilities across New Zealand to understand their experiences with processing compostable food packaging including compostable coffee cups. 11 facilities have agreed to be listed as accepting compostable food packaging with a further two unnamed facilities able to do so. 7 facilities are piloting processing systems or developing the capability to accept compostable cups and other compostable packaging waste. Coverage varies with North Island facilities identified in Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, New Plymouth, Hawkes Bay and Wellington and South Island facilities in Tasman and Kaikoura.

Lyn Mayes, Manager of the Packaging Forum's Public Place Recycling Scheme which commissioned the research said: "Around 295 million hot and cold cups are consumed annually in New Zealand with over 90% of coffee cup brands are either manufactured or sold by our members. The industry has seen a significant growth in the volume of compostable cups and with this confusion as to whether, where and how they can be composted.

"We commissioned Beyond the Bin to assess the range of cups on the market; survey facilities about whether they can process compostable cups; identify the barriers and make recommendations as to how these can be resolved. Based on the information supplied by our members, the compostable coffee cups in the New Zealand market have similar specifications and are typically certified to the EN13432 (Commercial compost European standard)."

Kim Renshaw, Director Beyond the Bin said: "The composting industry has some will and/ or capacity to process food packaging including coffee cups and in most cases, their C-PLA lids. The barriers they face to process compostable food packaging in their existing operations are varied and significant. Contamination, lack of identification, length of processing time, volume vs weight and organic input restrictions affect a composter's will and capacity."

"The Packaging Forum with its members can help solve these issues by creating an identification and standard for cups and innovating product design to reduce the length of processing time. Contamination, volume vs weight and organic input restrictions are process/ regulation related which require a combined effort from waste producers, service providers, regulatory bodies and packaging companies."

"Many composting facilities have special relationships with credible waste producers, those who contaminate their waste and provide a clean waste stream which means a facility might take compostable food packaging from one customer, service provider or event who agree to use composter approved packaging and are employing decontamination techniques."

Mayes said that the study provides a pathway:

"We have already initiated a change to our funding criteria for events this year requiring applicants to provide evidence they will separate packaging waste either during the event or through post event sortation. Our members are working with community composting service providers such as Home Grown Waiheke Trust to provide local solutions and we see an opportunity to support standalone compost units as an option for small scale local solutions. And it is particularly exciting that product innovation is taking place with members looking at the development of new products capable of home composting."

"Work is underway to develop an agreed identification system for coffee cups which will clearly identify them as compostable or recyclable where facilities exist and a process for its use. We have started discussion with the Waste Management Institute New Zealand (WasteMINZ) about an identification standard to ensure consistency and increase the likelihood of acceptance."

Paul Evans, Chief Executive of WasteMINZ said "We commend industry for undertaking this research. For any solution to be effective in the long term there needs to be real collaboration between packaging manufacturers and the composting industry, recognising the potential impacts on compost products. We look forward to working positively with the Packaging Forum to determine an appropriate composting standard and identification system, which meets the needs of all parties".

The full report is available on: <http://recycling.kiwi.nz/>

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