



# Public Attitudes Toward Food Scrap and Curbside Recycling

## *Results of Public Opinion Surveys for Stopwaste.org.*

*Surveys Conducted:  
October 30 – November 12, 2007*

320-310A/B

*Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates  
Opinion Research & Public Policy Analysis*

Santa Monica, CA – Oakland, CA – Madison, WI – Mexico City

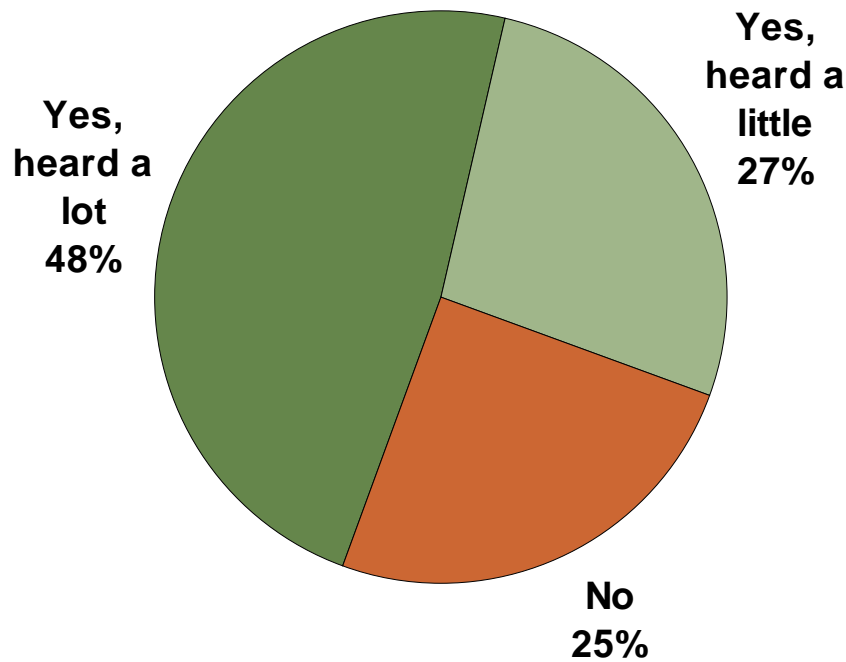
# Methodology

- **CURBSIDE:** Telephone interviews with 601 Alameda County residents, conducted October 30 – November 4, 2007, with a margin of sampling error of +/- 4.0%
- Comparisons to baseline survey of 804 County residents conducted In November 2002
- **FOOD WASTE:** Telephone interviews with 603 residents of communities with food scrap recycling who have individual trash and recycling service, conducted November 6-12, 2007, with a margin of sampling error of +/- 4.0%
- Comparisons to baseline survey of 817 residents of Alameda, Castro Valley, Fremont and San Leandro conducted in May 2004

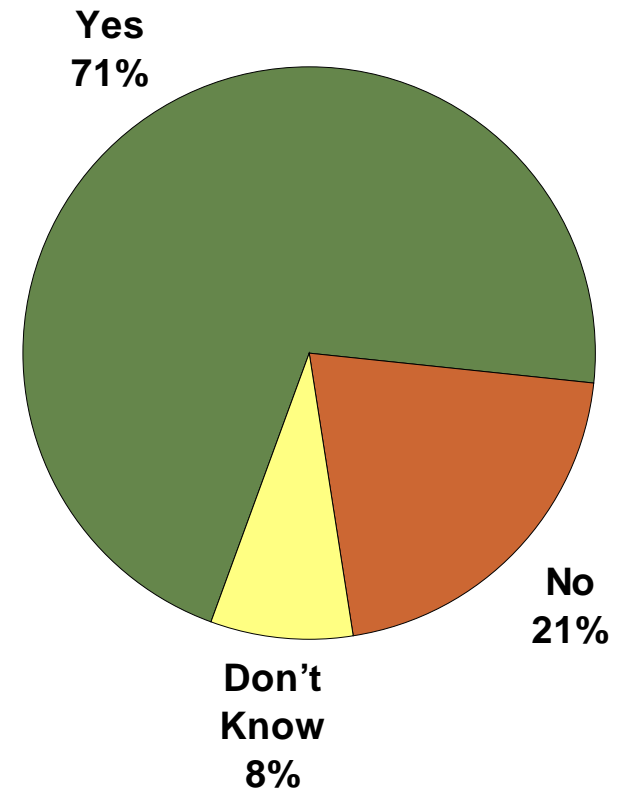
# Food Scrap Recycling

# About three-quarters of those polled are aware that they can recycle food scraps.

Have Heard About Food Scrap Recycling



Aware They Can Recycle



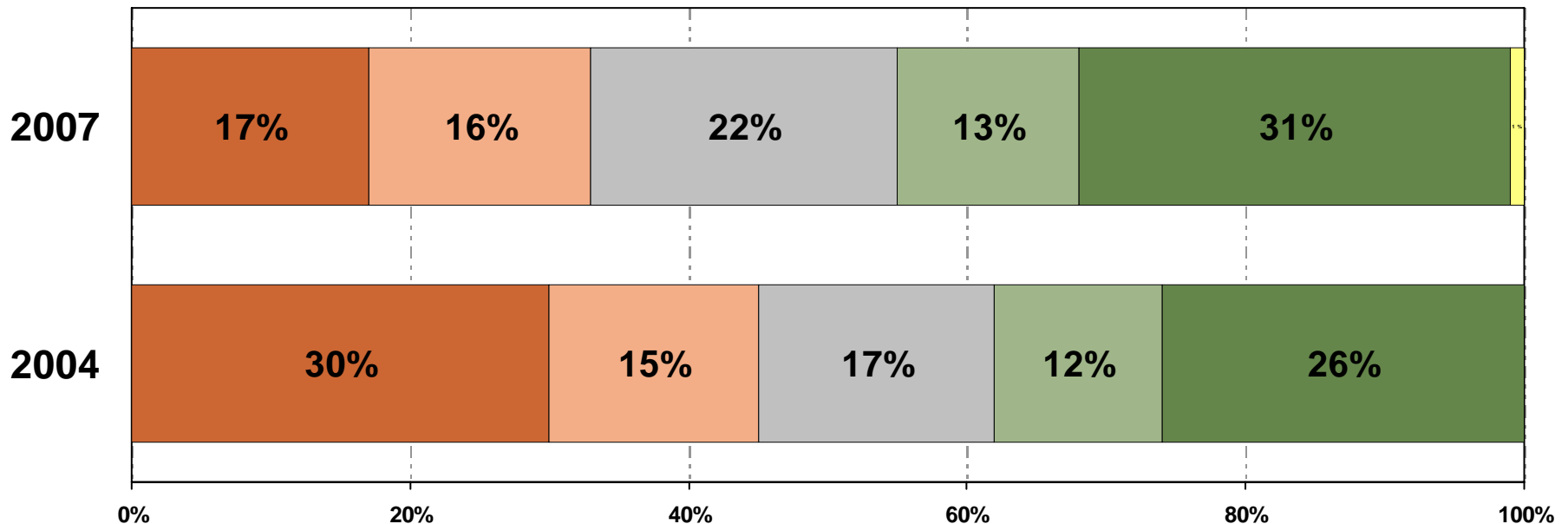
5. In the past 2 years, have you heard or read anything about recycling food scraps, including leftover food, food waste, and food-soiled paper, in your yard waste cart?  
6. Does your trash service allow you to put food scraps and food soiled paper in your yard waste cart, or not?

# Residents vary in how much food they recycle, but it appears to have increased since 2004.

*(Asked only of 71% aware they have food scrap recycling)*

*How much of your leftovers or food scraps and food soiled paper would you say you put in your yard waste cart? Please use a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means you don't put any food scraps in your yard waste cart, and 5 means you put as many food scraps as you can in your yard waste cart.*

■ 1 (Don't put any scraps in the cart) ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 (Put as many scraps as I can in the cart) ■ DON'T KNOW

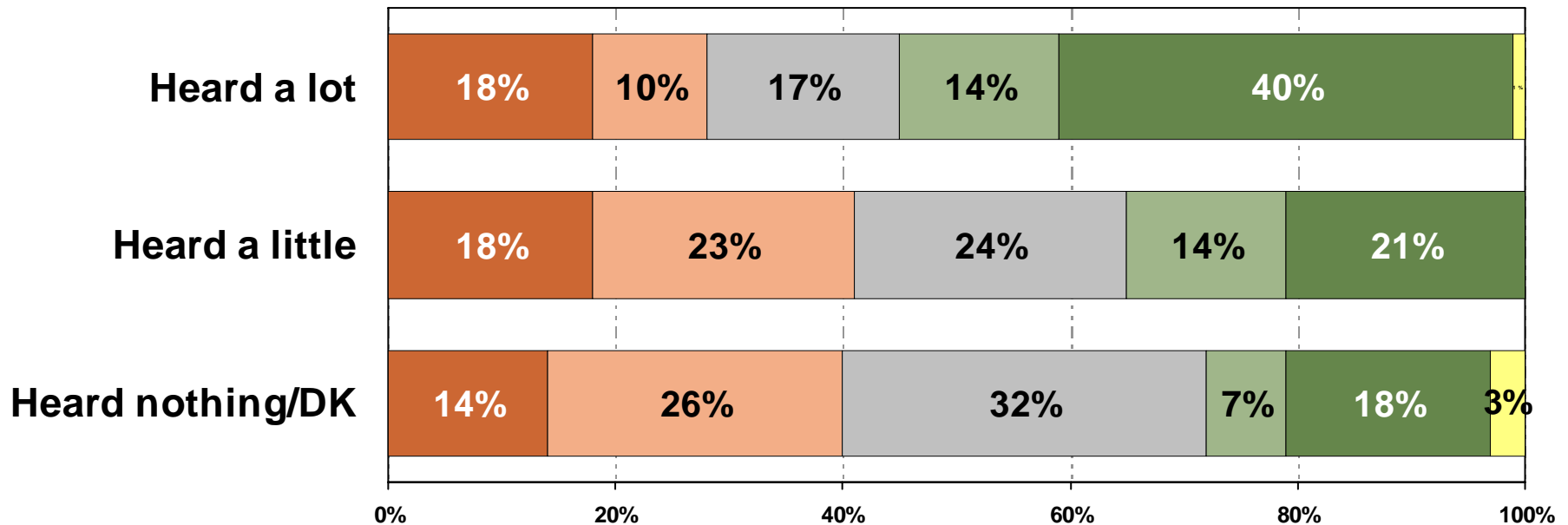


# Those who have heard more about the program are more likely to recycle.

(Asked only of 71% aware they have food scrap recycling)

*How much of your leftovers or food scraps and food soiled paper would you say you put in your yard waste cart? Please use a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means you don't put any food scraps in your yard waste cart, and 5 means you put as many food scraps as you can in your yard waste cart.*

■ 1 (Don't put any scraps in the cart) ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 (Put as many scraps as I can in the cart) ■ DON'T KNOW



# Demographic Profile of Heavy Food Scrap Recyclers

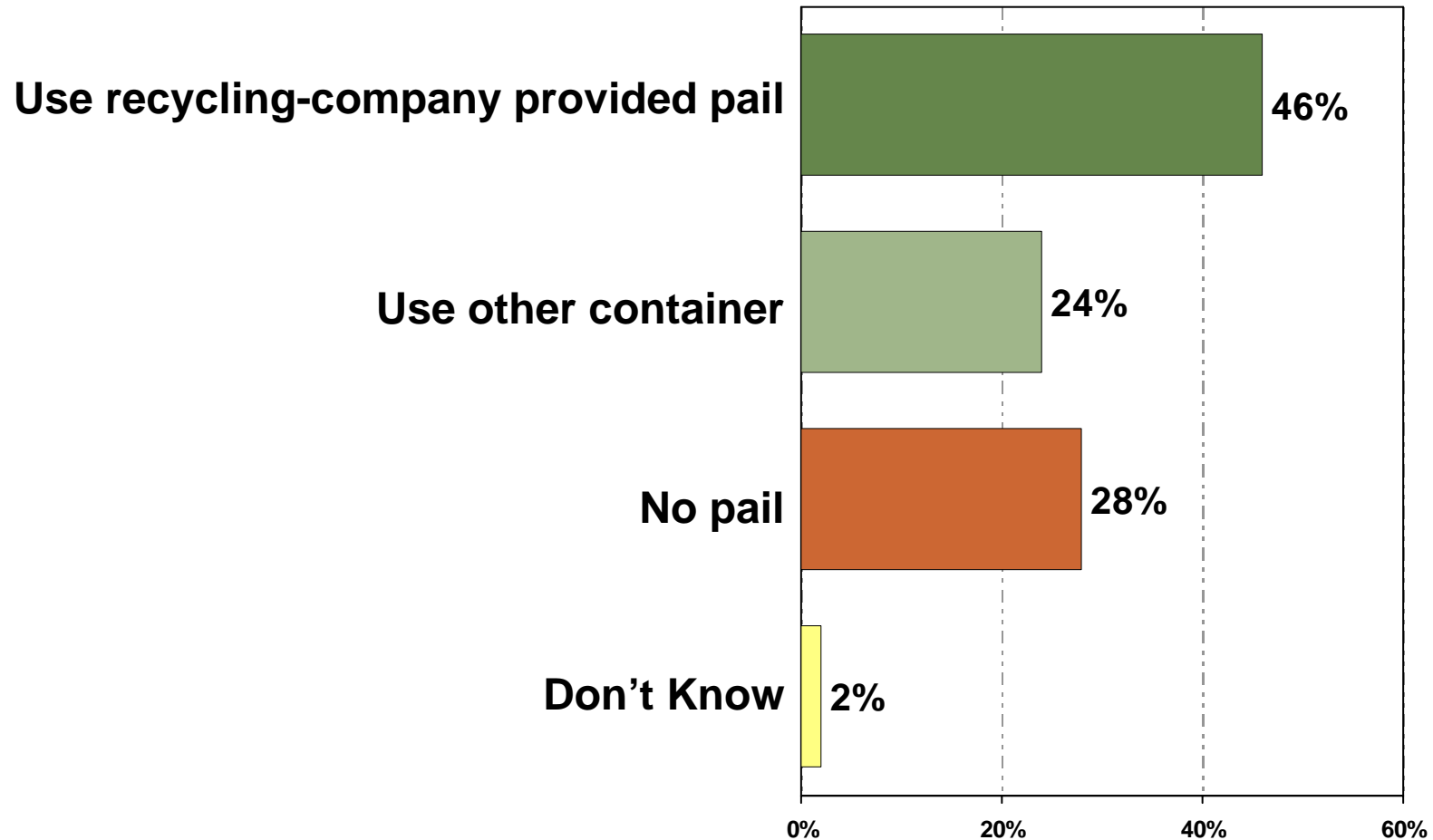
- Those who rate their amount of recycling a “4” or “5” on the five-point scale are considered “heavy recyclers” (31% of all residents and 44% of those aware they can recycle).
- Among those who use their pail, 64% qualify as heavy recyclers, versus 45% of those who use other methods.
- Those who consider themselves environmentalists recycle more than those who do not.
- Men 50 and over are somewhat more likely to recycle heavily, women under 50 somewhat less so.
- Residents over 65 tend to recycle more food scraps.
- Residents in lower-income households say they recycle more of their food scraps.

# Demographic Profile of Non-Recyclers

- Overall, 17% of all respondents are aware that they have food scrap recycling, but do not participate.
- Residents of multi-unit buildings are almost twice as likely as those in single-family homes to recycle no food scraps.
- Nearly one-quarter of upper-income households do not recycle any food scraps.
- A separate category are those who are unaware that they even have the opportunity to recycle food scraps (29% of all residents). These residents tend disproportionately to live in multi-unit buildings, to be Latino or African-American, to be non-college educated women, and to live in middle-income households.

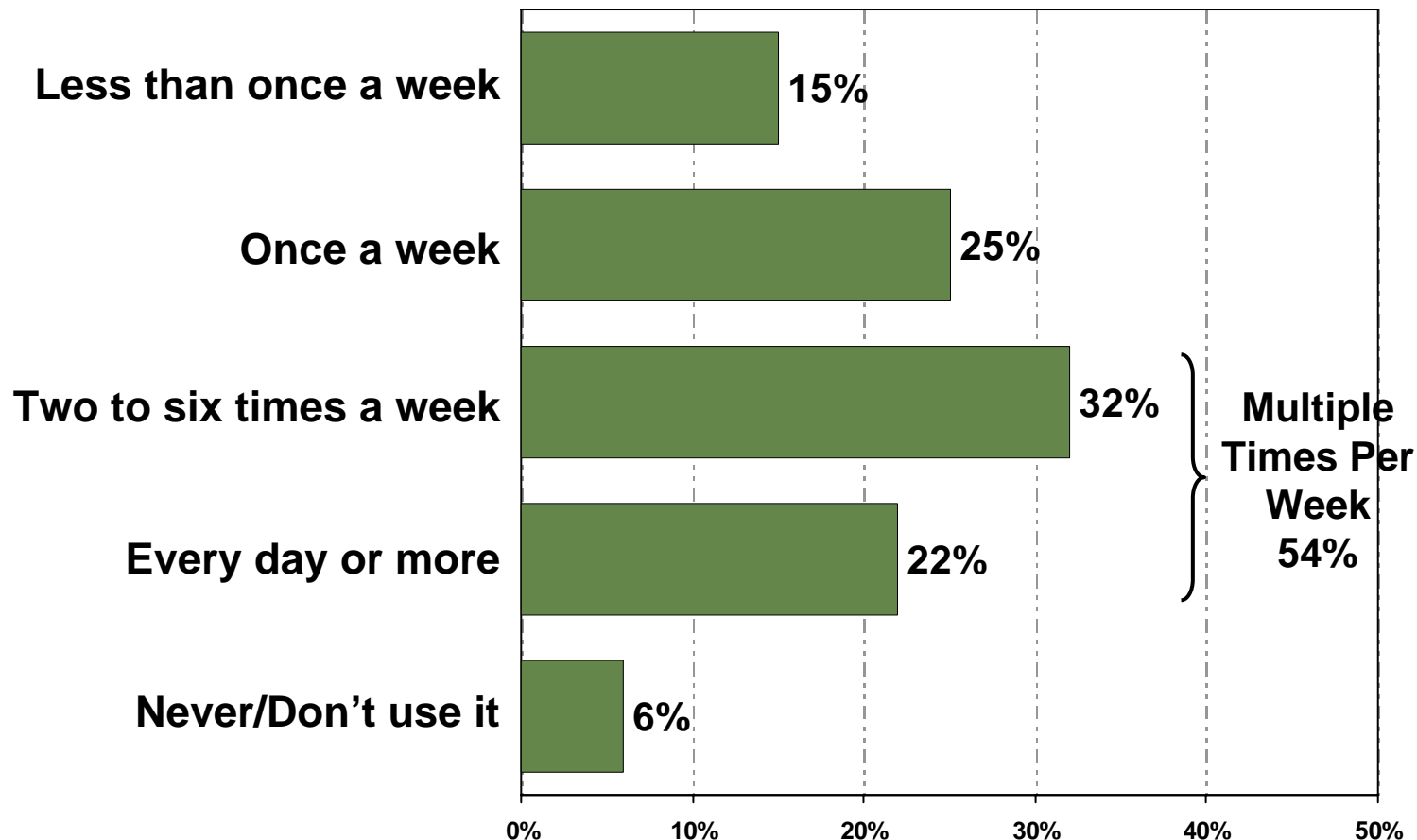
# Less than half of recyclers use the company pail.

*(Asked only of the 58% who recycle some food scraps)*



# Most recyclers put scraps in their yard cart several times per week.

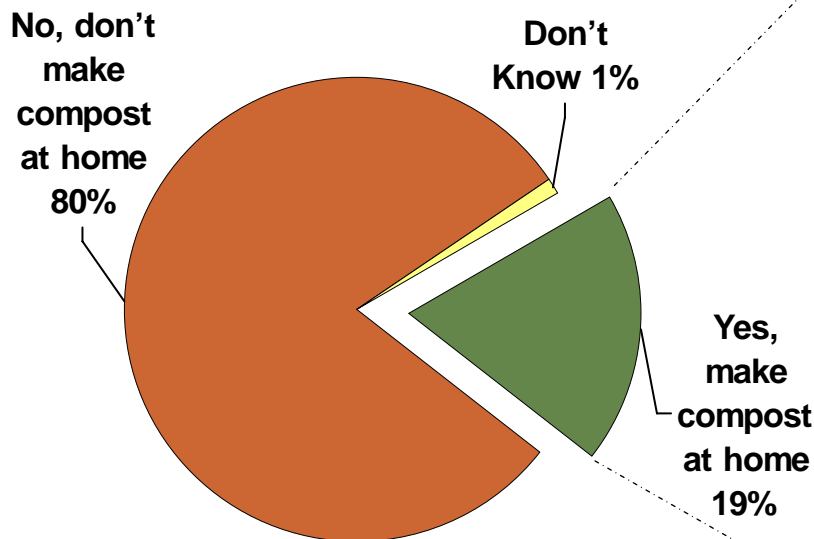
*(Asked only of the 58% who recycle some food scraps)*



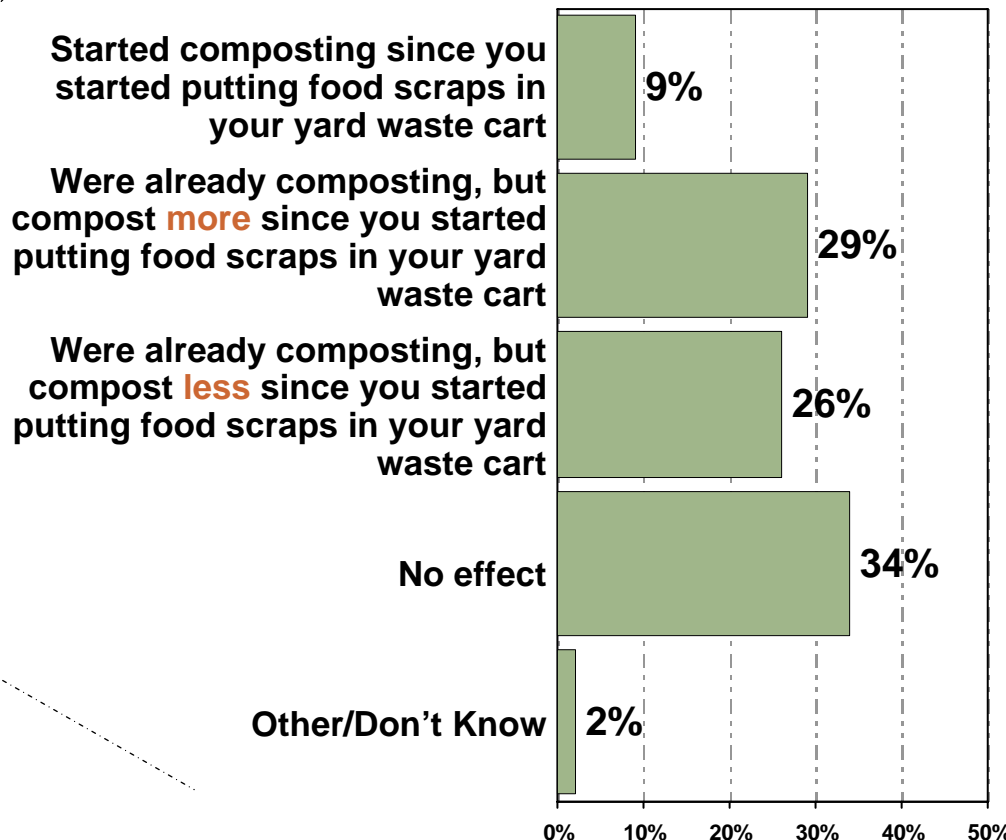
# Few composters say food scrap recycling has affected their composting.

(Asked only of the 58% who recycle some food scraps)

## Recyclers Who Compost



## Impact on Composting



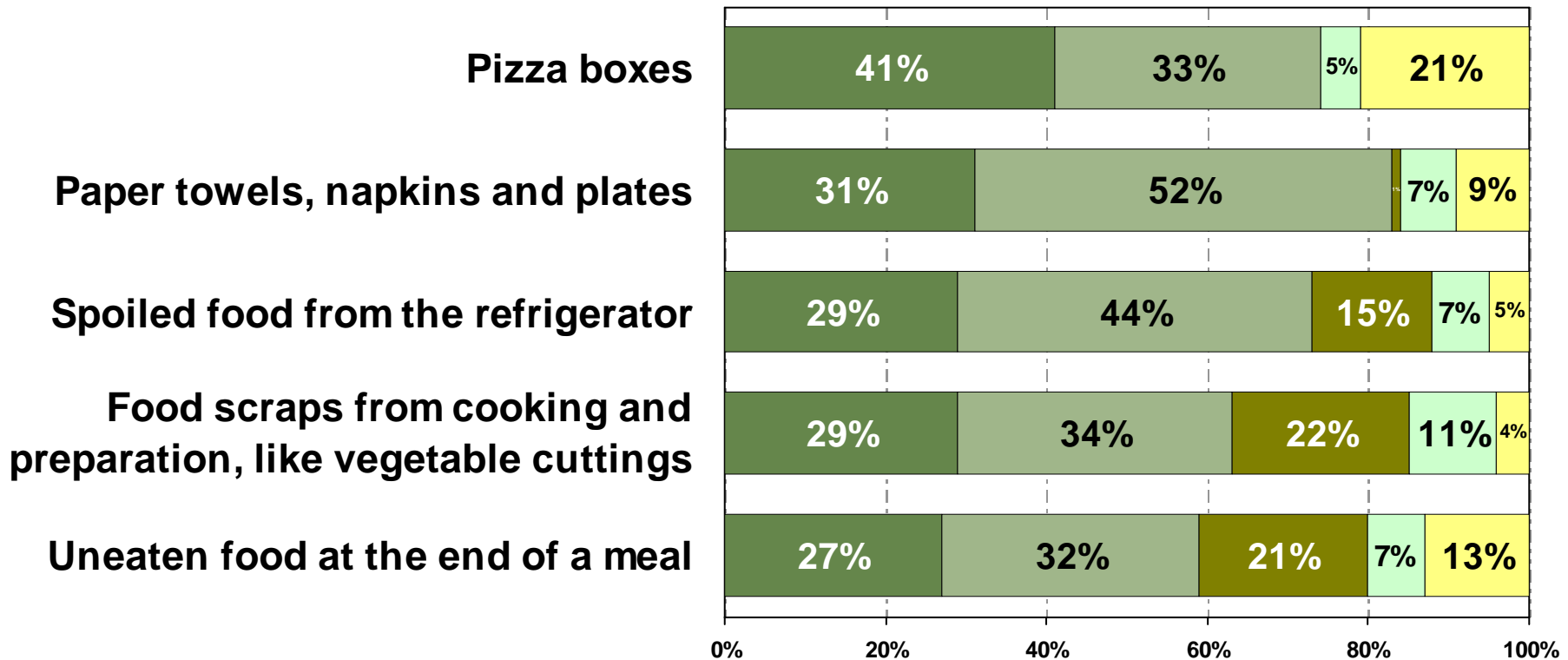
21. Do you make compost at home in a compost bin, compost pile, or worm bin, or not?

22. What effect would you say putting food scraps in your yard waste cart has had on your composting at home? Would you say you...

# Majorities of those polled do not recycle materials that are recyclable.

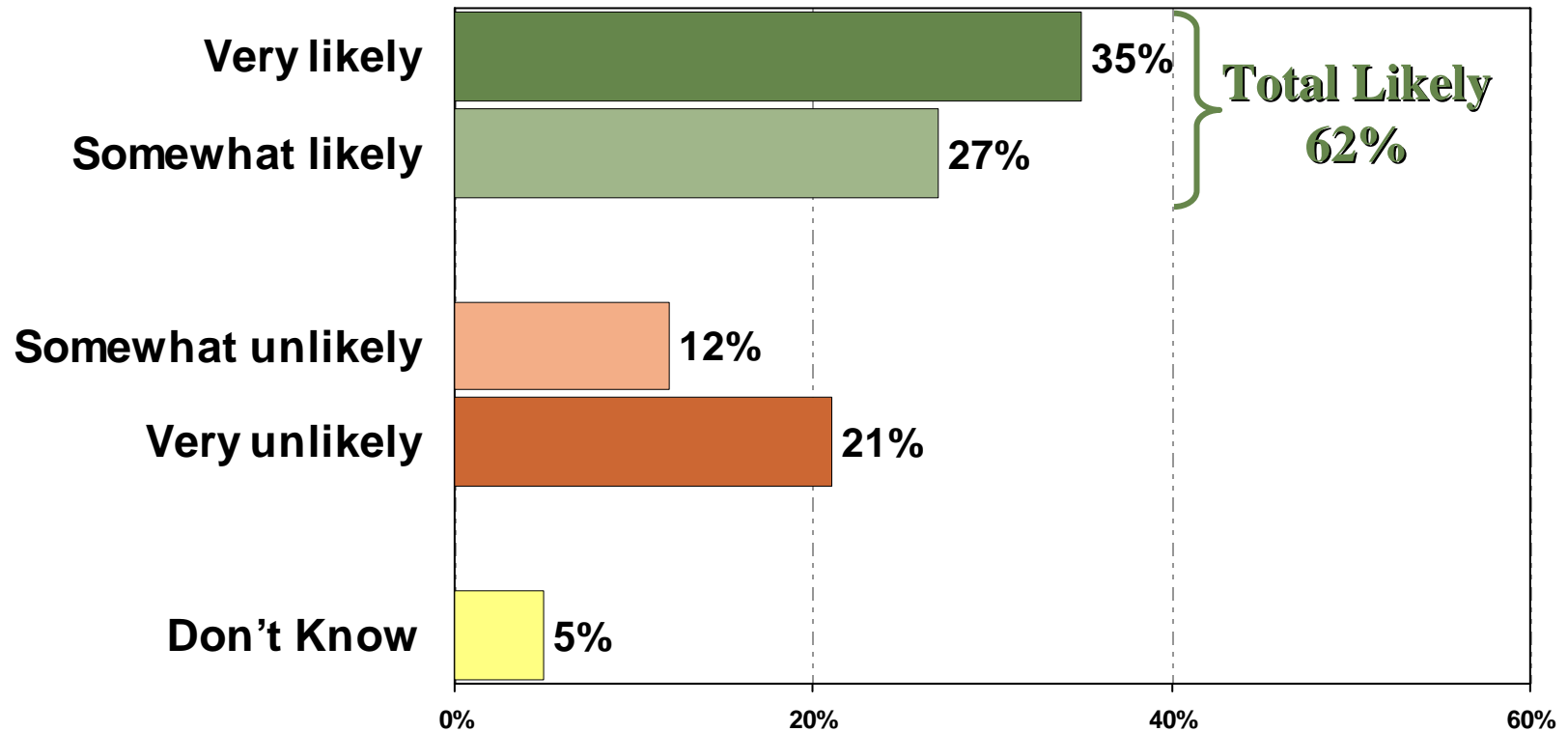
*I am going to read you a list of different waste products you might have to throw away from time to time in your household. For each waste product, please tell me how you MOST OFTEN throw it away in your household: do you put it in your trash can, your food scraps pail or yard waste cart, your sink or garbage disposal, or your compost pile or bin?*

■ Scrap Pail/Yard Cart ■ Trash Can ■ Sink/Disposal ■ Compost Pile ■ Other/Don't Use/DK/NA



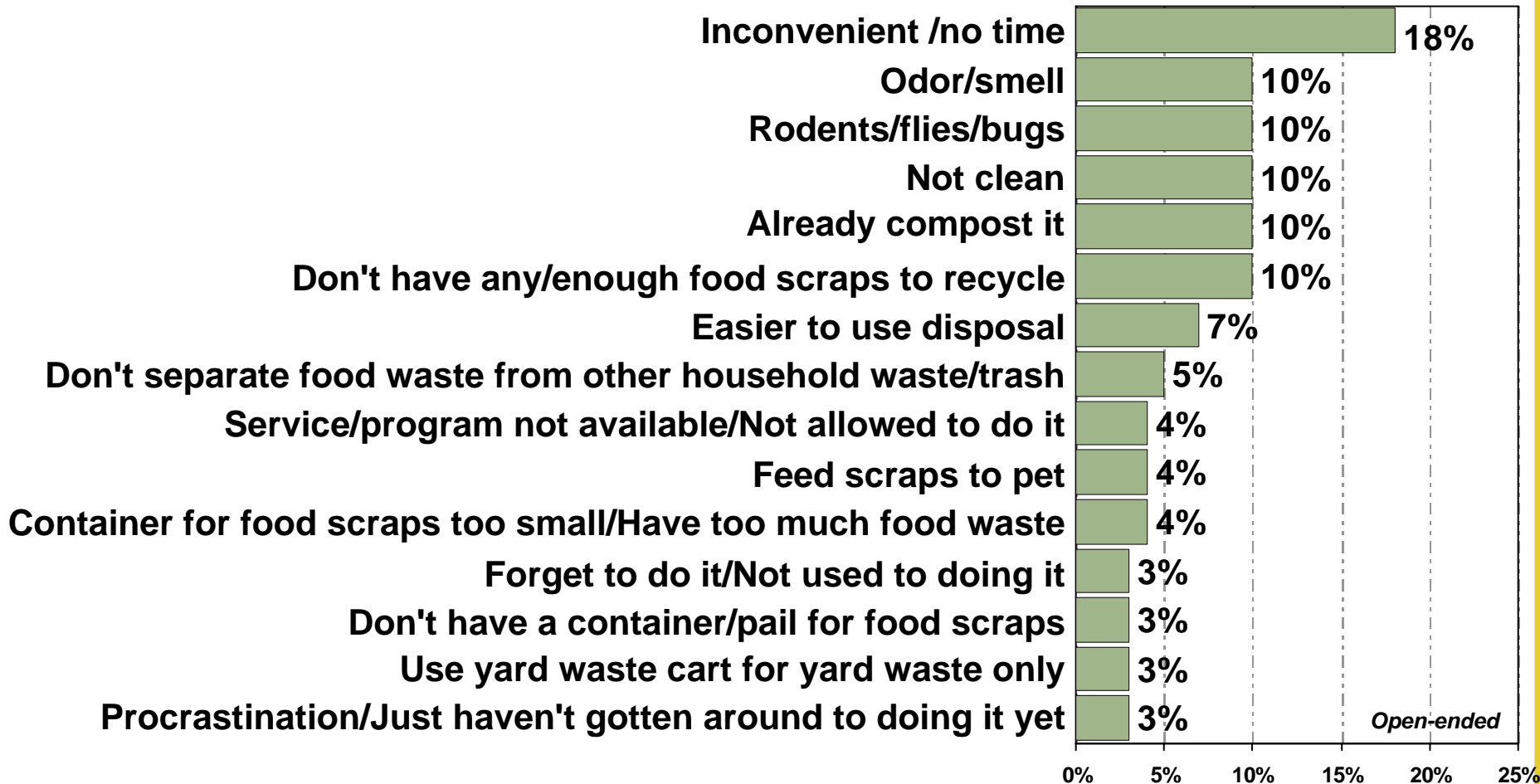
# Most of those unaware they can recycle food scraps and soiled paper would be likely to do so.

*(Asked only of 29% unaware they can recycle)*



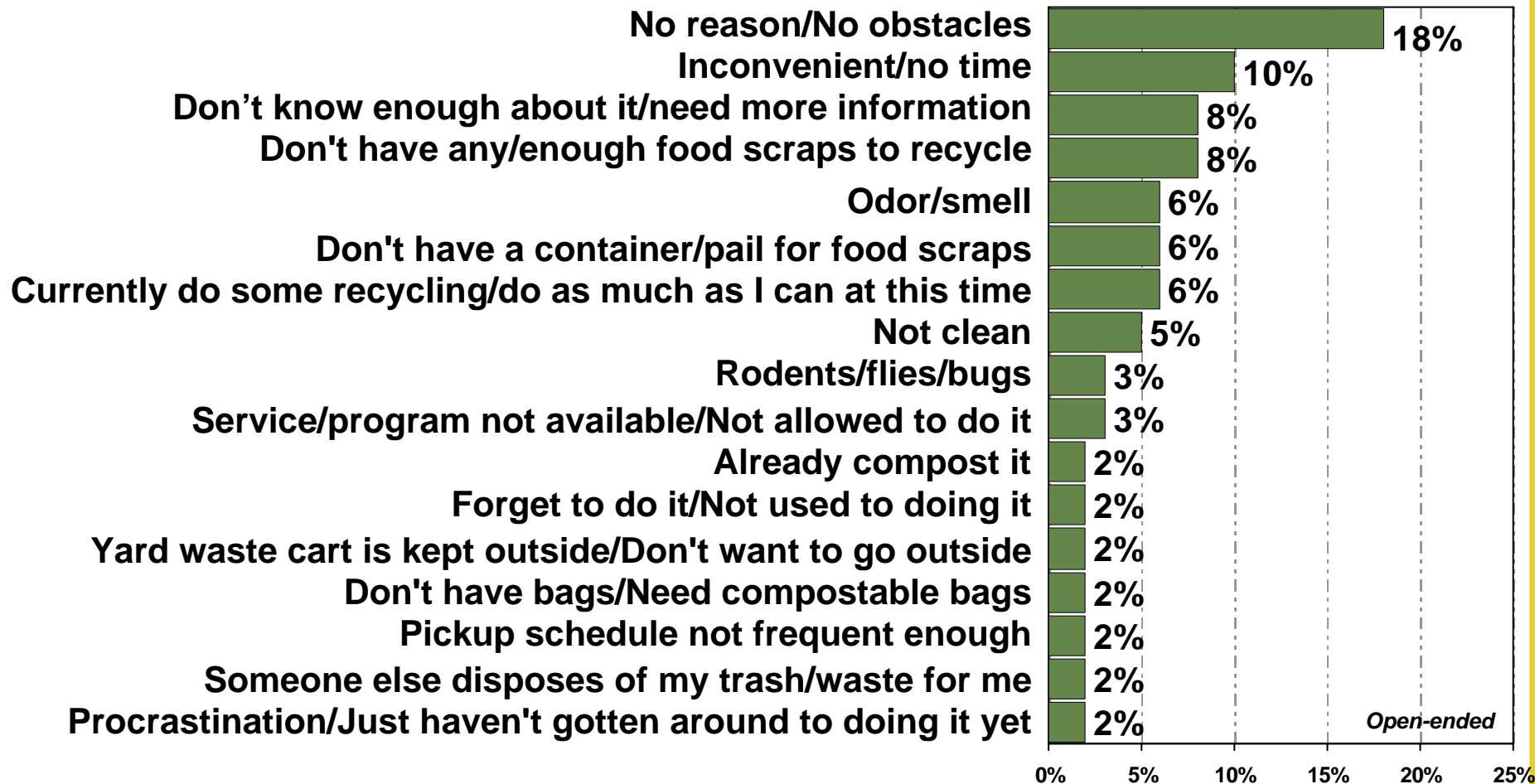
# Respondents who do not recycle offer a variety of reasons.

*(Asked only of 22% who say they recycle little or would be unlikely to do so, top responses, responses grouped)*



# Among all residents, the top obstacles are convenience and information.

*What is the most important obstacle preventing you from recycling more food scraps and food soiled paper?*



# Most residents say they are well-informed about food scrap recycling.

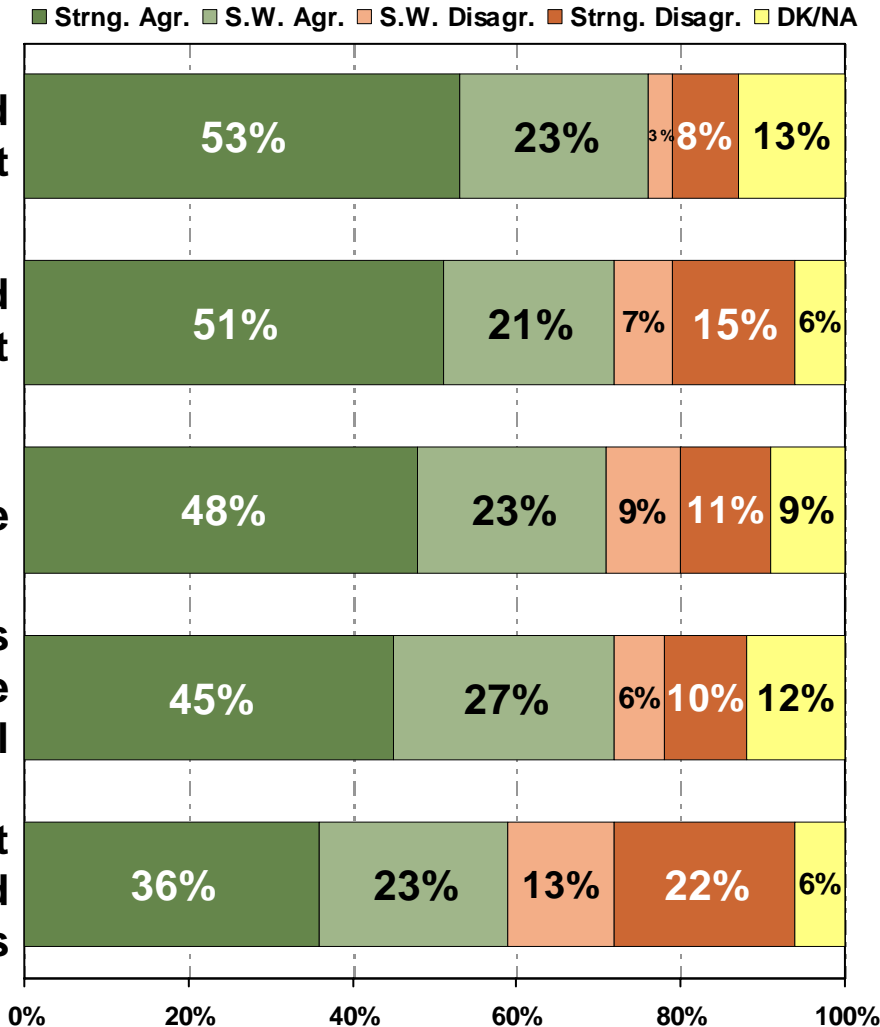
The food scraps and green waste from my yard waste cart is eventually turned into compost

I understand what types of food scraps can and cannot go in my yard waste cart

The food scraps recycling program is easy to use

Putting food scraps in my yard waste cart saves water and energy by reducing usage of the garbage disposal

If I could buy compostable plastic bags that could be put in the yard waste bin with the food scraps, I would recycle more food scraps



15. For each of the following statements please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. If you do not have an opinion one way or the other, please just say so.

# Continued

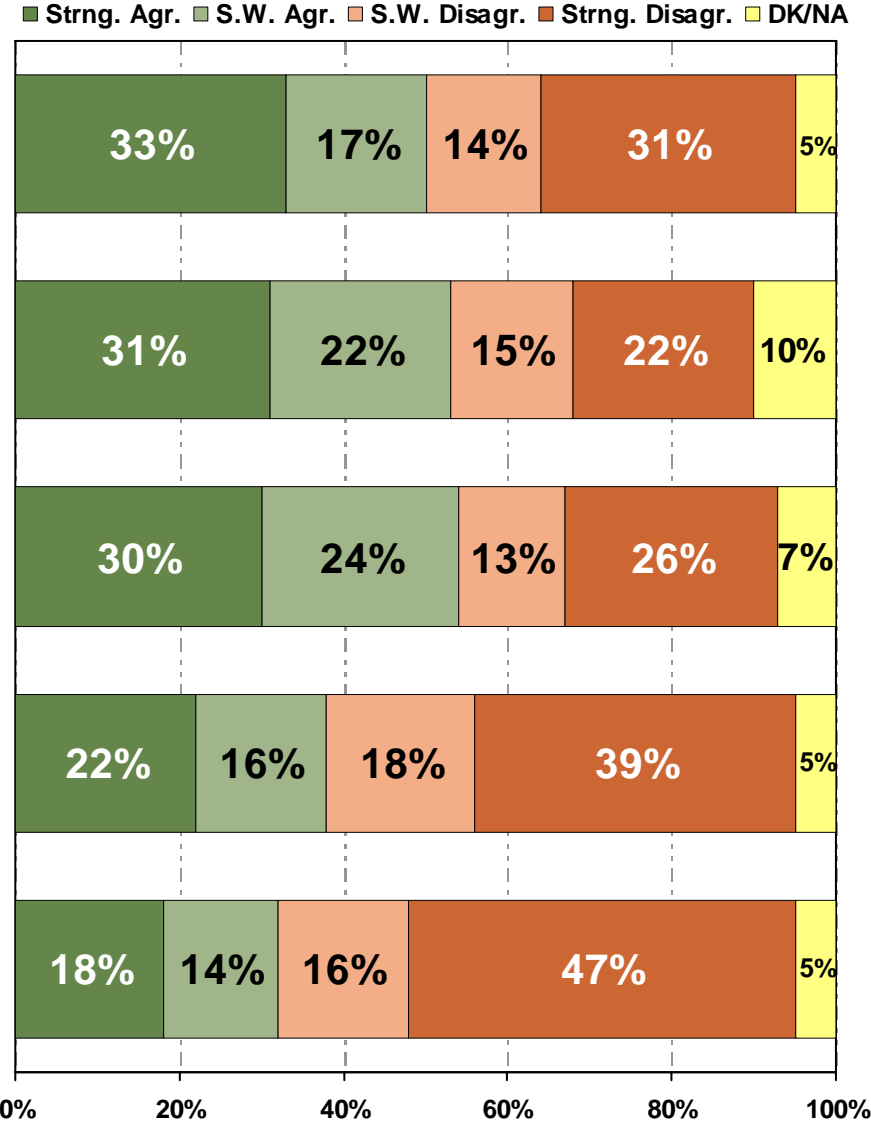
**I only put food scraps into my yard waste cart if I know I am going to take the yard waste cart out to the curb for pickup soon**

**Putting food scraps in my yard waste cart saves money by allowing me to have a smaller trash cart**

**There are some foods I know I could recycle in the yard waste cart, but I don't**

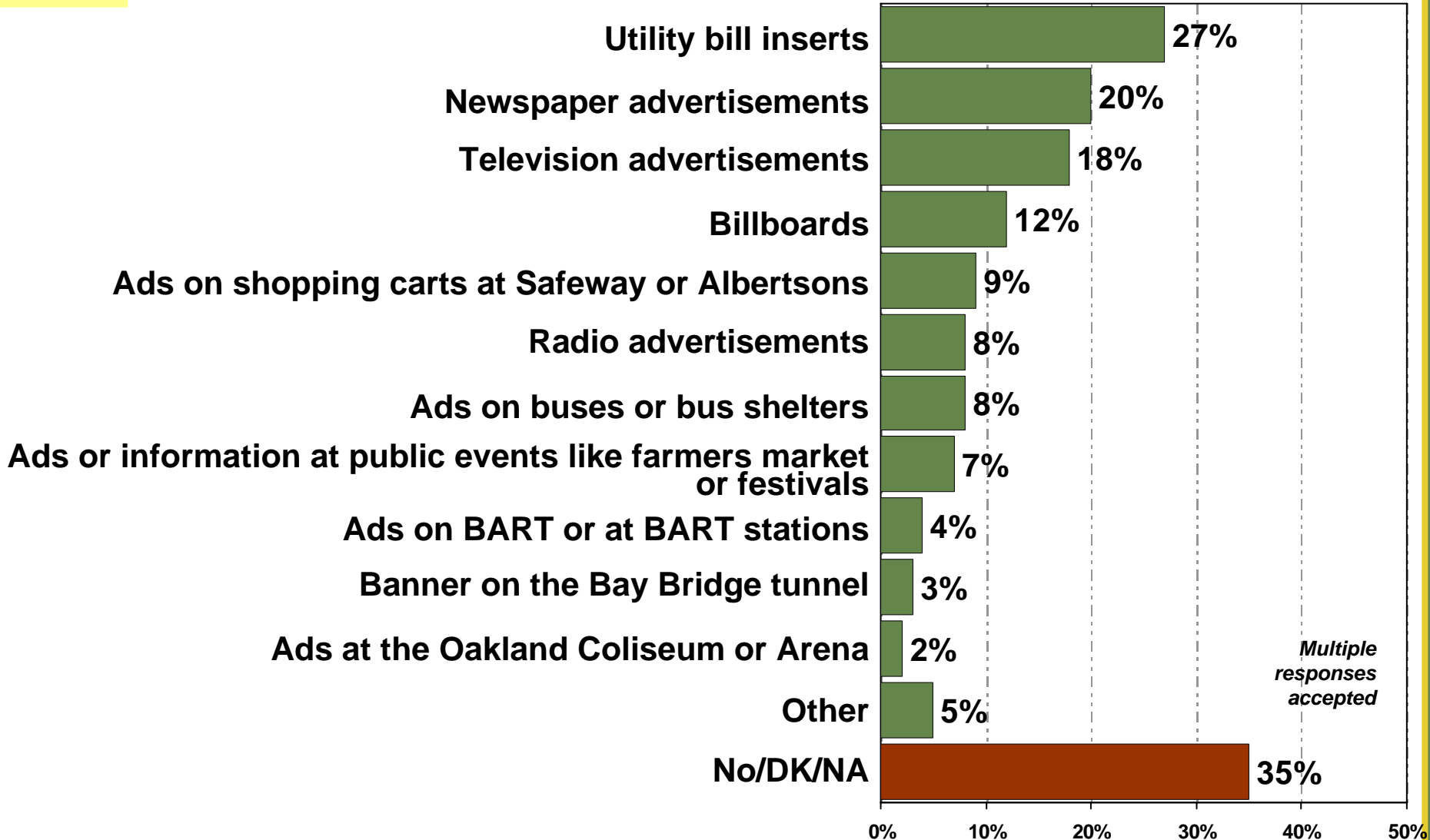
**I only put food scraps into my yard waste cart if there is other yard waste in the cart already**

**I talk to friends and neighbors about food scrap recycling**



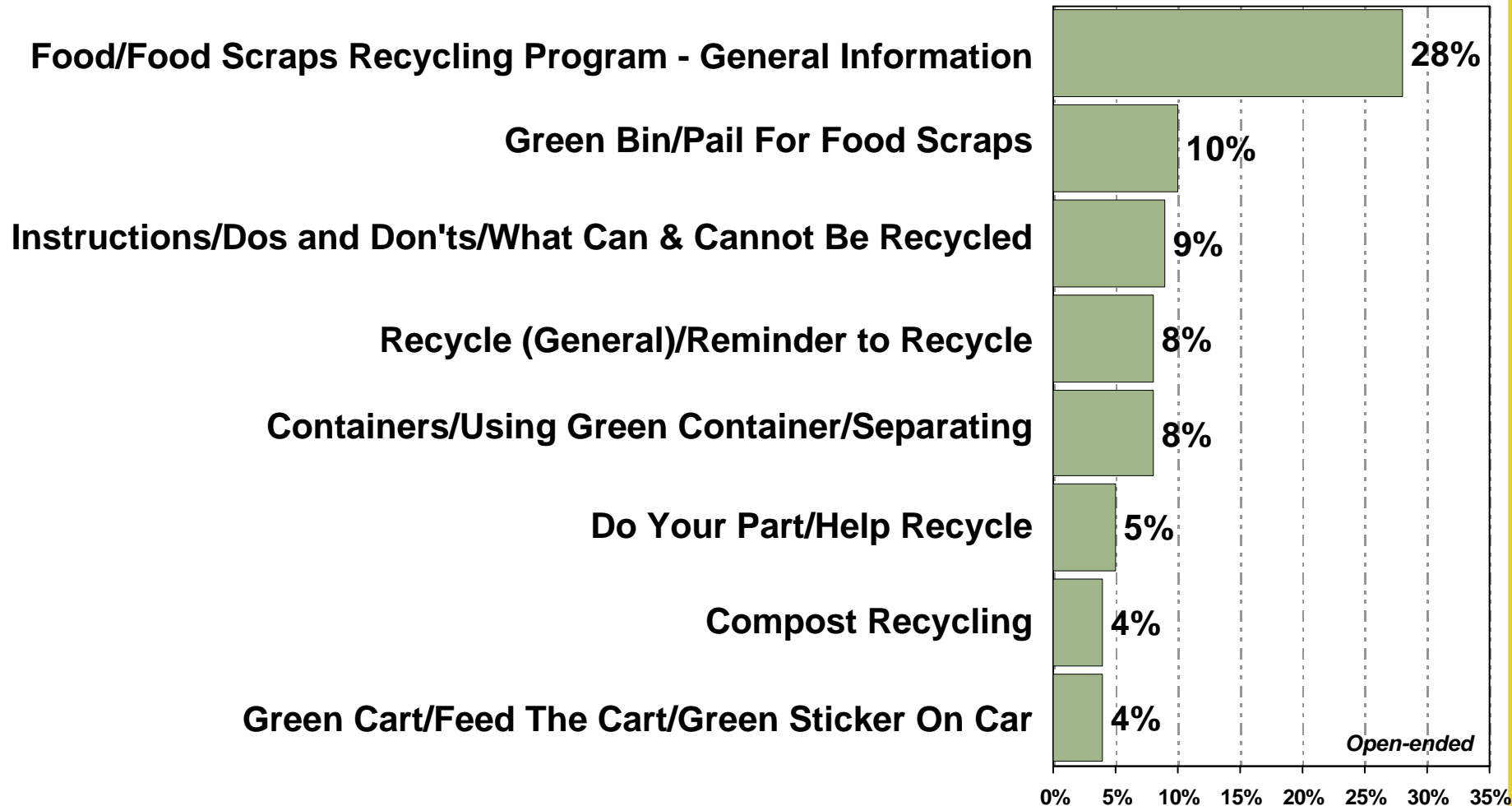
15. For each of the following statements please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. If you do not have an opinion one way or the other, please just say so.

# Most residents recall seeing messages about food scrap recycling.



# Types of Messages Recalled

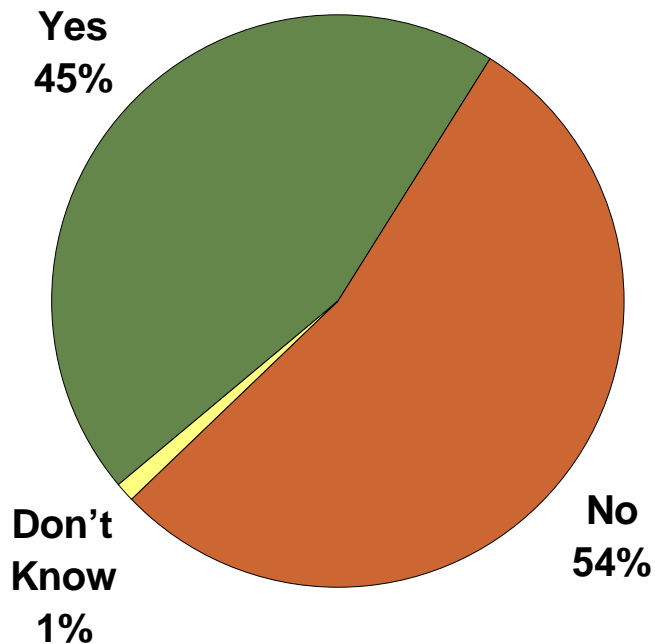
(Asked only of 65% who recalled messages unaided, top responses, responses grouped)



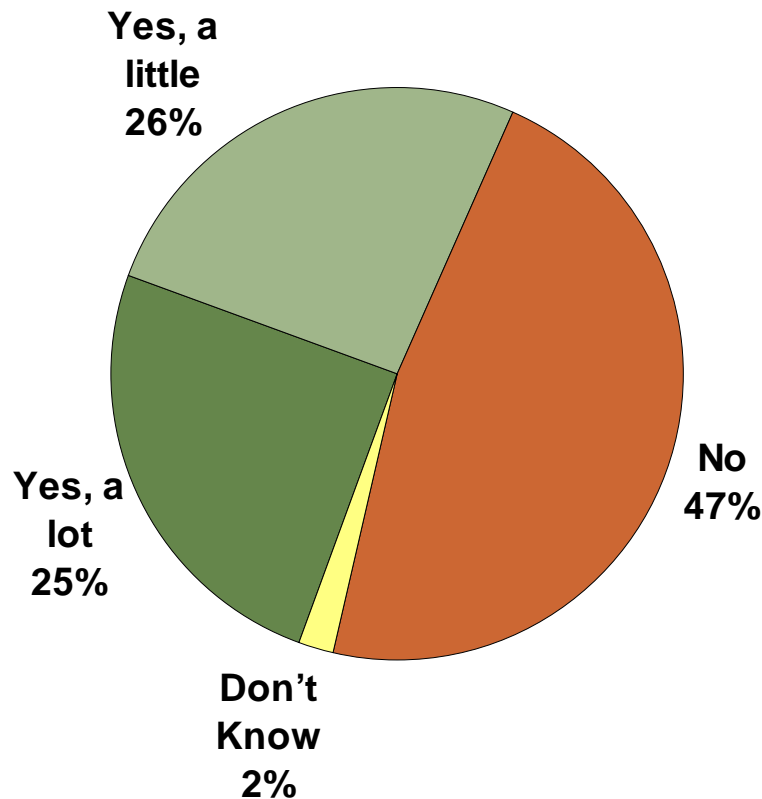
# Most of those who saw the messages either started food scrap recycling or increased the total amount they recycle.

*(Asked only of the 68% with aided awareness of the ad campaign)*

## Did the Ads Motivate You to Start Recycling?



## Did the Ads Motivate You to Increase Recycling?



13. Did the ads motivate you to start recycling food scraps and food soiled paper, when you had not been recycling them before?

14. Did you increase the amount of food scraps and food soiled paper you recycle after seeing the ads?

# Messages about the impact of food scrap recycling are persuasive.

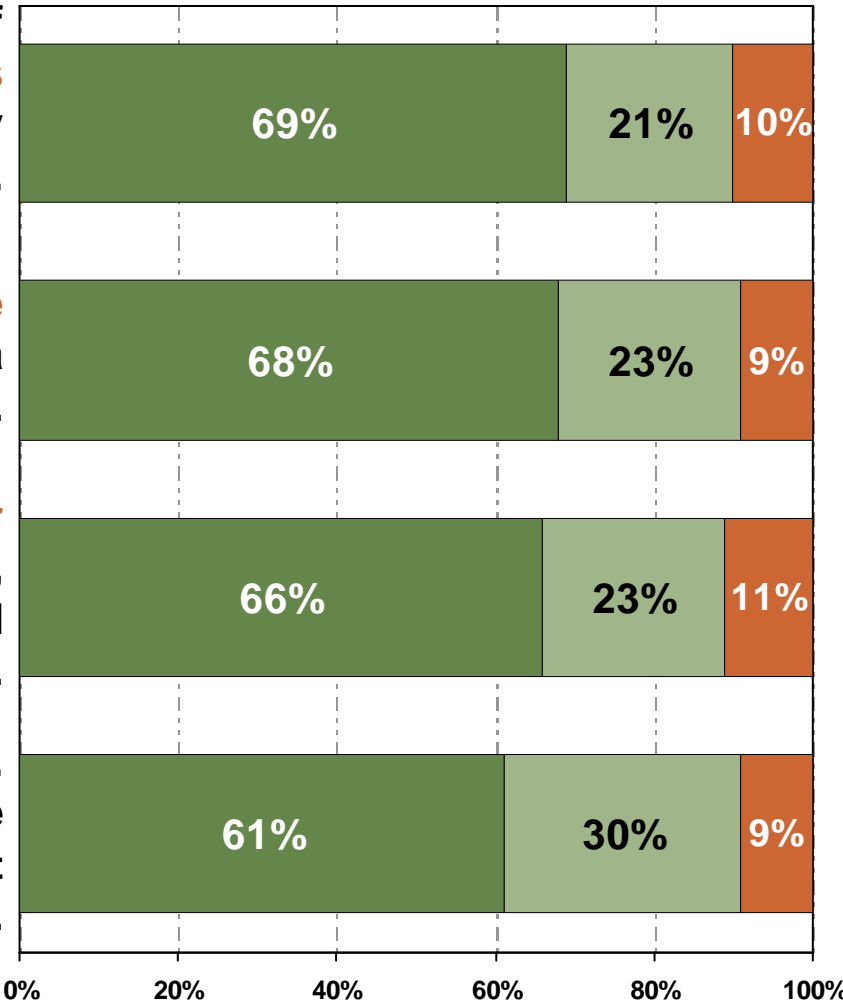
\*Food scraps are a resource, not trash. Instead of taking up space in the landfill, **your food scraps become compost** - a valuable resource used by landscapers and farmers.

\*We all have a shared responsibility to **care for the health of our planet**. Recycling food scraps is a small step we all can take to help.

When we recycle food scraps, we help **teach our children** about the importance of reducing waste, reusing what we can to nourish the soil, and recycling.

\*Recycling food scraps is **part of a natural cycle**. Recycled food scraps go back to the earth, where they enrich soil for farmers. We should make it second nature.

■ Very Conv. ■ S.W. Conv. ■ Not Too/Don't Bel./DK/NA



# Continued

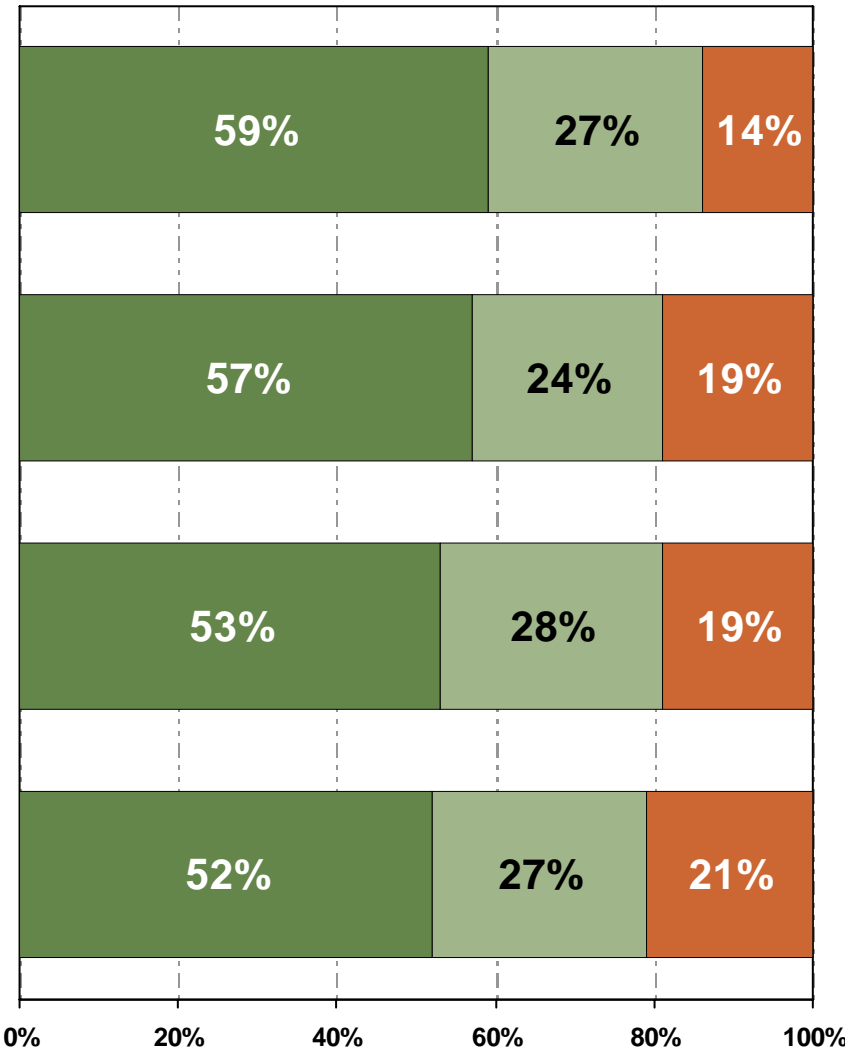
Recycling food scraps is **an essential part of all of our efforts to recycle**. We should not throw away food scraps any more than we would throw away bottles and cans.

Recycling food scraps is **easy**. All you have to do is place them in your yard waste recycling bin.

Food scraps and food soiled paper are **a major part of our waste** - making up approximately 35 percent of what we throw away in Alameda County.

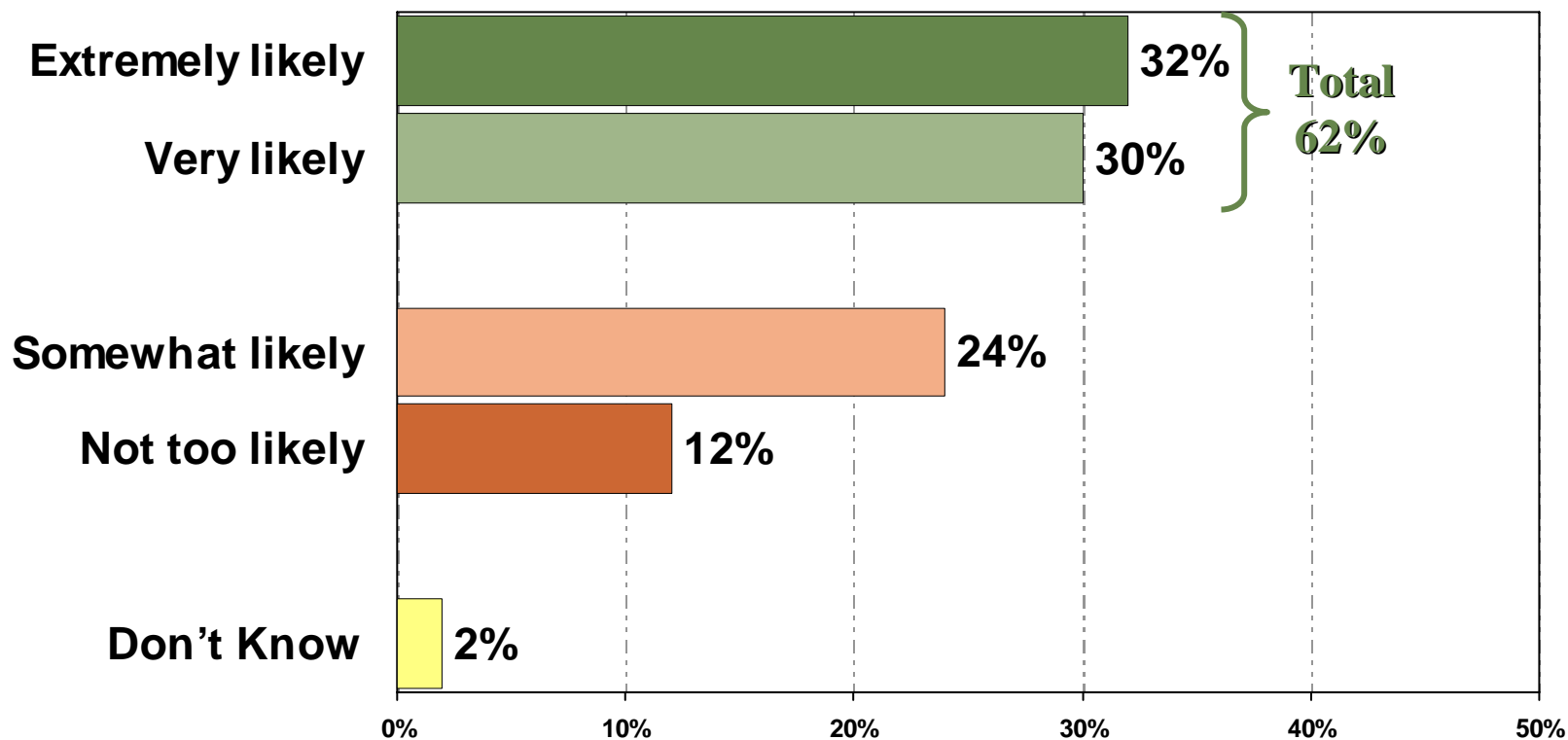
**\*Food scraps cause more greenhouse gas pollution when they are thrown in landfills than when they are composted. Recycling food scraps is one more small thing we can all do to fight global warming.**

■ Very Conv. ■ S.W. Conv. ■ Not Too/Don't Bel./DK/NA



# After the messages, more than three in five say they will make an effort to recycle more.

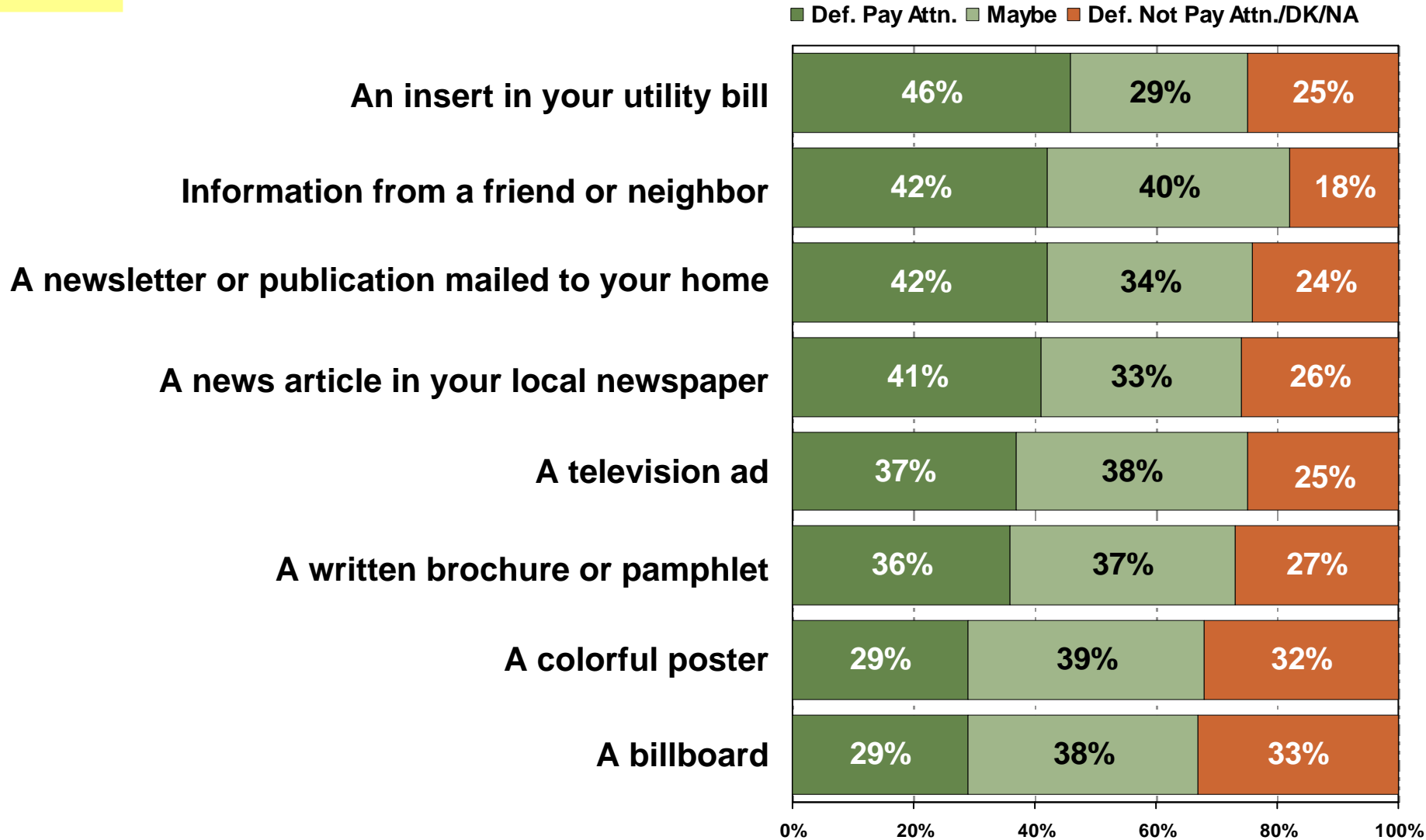
*Given everything you have heard, how likely will you be to make an effort to recycle more of your food scraps:*



# Demographic Profile of Those “Extremely Likely” to Recycle More

- Overall, about one-third of residents (32%) say they will be “extremely likely” to increase their food scrap recycling after hearing the messages.
- Current heavy recyclers are among those most likely to increase their recycling – including those who use a pail, and empty their pails every day.
- Self-identified environmentalists are nearly twice as likely to say they will increase their recycling as other groups.
- Over 40% of Latinos say they will be “extremely likely” to increase their recycling – compared to less than 30% of other ethnic groups.
- College graduates are also more likely to say they will increase their recycling.

# Again, utility bill inserts are one of the best ways to reach people.

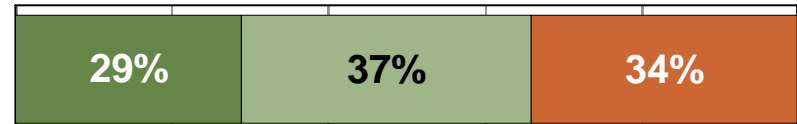


27. Next, I am going to read you a list of ways to present information about food scrap recycling to the public. Please tell me whether you would definitely pay attention, maybe pay attention, or definitely not pay attention to information about food scrap recycling if it were presented to you in that way.

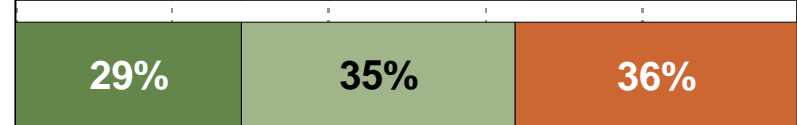
# Continued

■ Def. Pay Attn. ■ Maybe ■ Def. Not Pay Attn./DK/NA

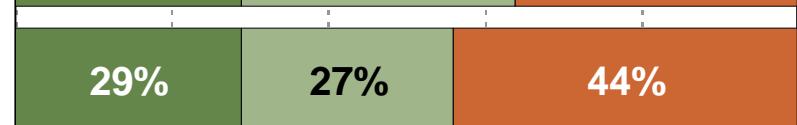
**An advertisement in the newspaper**



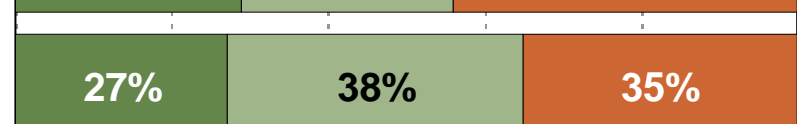
**A booth at a special event, such as a fair, festival or farmer's market**



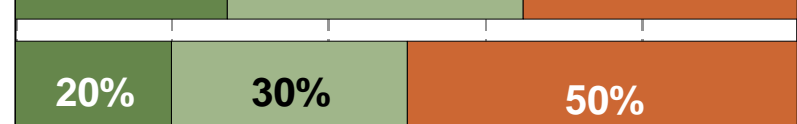
**An advertisement at the movie theater**



**A radio ad**



**Information from an elected official, like the mayor**



**A website**



**Information from a celebrity**



**Community classes**



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

27. Next, I am going to read you a list of ways to present information about food scrap recycling to the public. Please tell me whether you would definitely pay attention, maybe pay attention, or definitely not pay attention to information about food scrap recycling if it were presented to you in that way.

# Conclusions and Recommendations: Curbside Recycling

- **The population that does not use curbside recycling is small and relatively distinct; it includes more residents with low levels of education or income, older residents, and African-Americans.**
- **Residents of multi-family buildings are another key target.**
- **Making recycling convenient – rather than persuading residents of its importance – seems to be the main challenge.**
- **School-based programs seem to be a promising method of outreach.**

# Conclusions and Recommendations: Food Scrap Recycling

- The more people hear about the program, the more they recycle, and many still have not heard anything about it.
- Residents remain confused about what types of materials they can recycle.
- The “yuck factor” – odor, cleanliness and pests – remains an obstacle for many of those who do not recycle much.
- In contrast to curbside recycling, many middle- and upper-income homes are *less* likely to recycle food scraps. Multi-family households remain a challenge.
- There is room to increase the amount of food scrap recycling – and the types of materials recycled – amount current recyclers.
- Continued repetition of messages to introduce the program, highlighting what can be recycled and where the material goes, may be most effective in increasing recycling.

**For more information, contact:**

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