



# Castro Valley Food Scrap Recycling Pilot Program

## Presentation of Focus Group Findings

Presented to

**Alameda County Waste Management Authority**

Prepared by

**The Evans McDonough Co.**

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# Program Description

- The 2000 Waste Characterization Study for Alameda County, revealed that food waste remains the number one item in the waste stream.
- In November 2001, the Castro Valley Sanitary District, with assistance from the Alameda County Waste Management Authority, implemented the first residential food waste recycling program in Alameda County.
- A pilot program was developed and offered to approximately 1,000 single-family households in Castro Valley.
- Under the program, residents are provided with a small plastic container to collect food scraps, that is then placed in the resident's yard or "green" waste cart for weekly pickup.

# Focus Group Methodology

- Two (2) focus groups among households in the Castro Valley food waste collection pilot area;
- Conducted on February 5, 2002;
- Groups moderated by Alex P. Evans;
- 6:00 pm group conducted among ten (10) “non-participants;”
- 8:00 pm group conducted among ten (10) “participants;”
- Groups video and audio taped;
- Screener and Protocol attached.

# Findings

- 1) Awareness of the food waste program among both participants and non-participants is high.
  - a) Both groups appeared anxious to talk about the program.
  - b) Non-participants are well aware of all aspects of the program. Lack of accurate information is not the barrier to participation.
  
- 2) There is no apparent difference between participants and non-participants in terms of general attitudes toward recycling or participation in established recycling programs (i.e. for the most part those that do not use the food scrap program are as likely to use curbside recycling programs as those who do use the food scrap program).

# Findings

- 3) Participation in the food waste program does not appear to compete with home composting (the program is not cannibalizing home composting, at least not yet).
  - a) Composters are continuing to compost and say they are using the green waste bin for food waste (meat, fish, etc) that they cannot or will not home compost.
  
- 4) Participants, like all early adapters, make the program work for them and come up with their own solutions to problems that arise.
  - a) Non-participants appear more inclined to give up on the program as soon as problems arise or let anticipated problems deter them from trying the program at all.

# Findings

- 5) The biggest competition for food waste is the garbage disposal.
  - a) The focus group participants saw no reason not to use their garbage disposal as they associated no cost or environmental consequence to the garbage disposal.
  
- 6) Neither participants, nor non-participants, could clearly articulate reasons for taking part in the program.
  - a) Participants just assumed that it was “good for the environment” but couldn’t give specific reasons beyond an almost generic “it’s good for the environment.”
  - b) Non-participants were hard pressed to come up with any reason, environmental or otherwise, why people should recycle their food waste.
  - c) While the program contains some perceived high hurdles, the lack of *why do it* was obvious. Participants did not distinguish between the benefits and detriments of composting and land filling.

# Findings

- 7) The lack of a clear beneficial use for the composted materials may also contribute to a lack of appreciation for the benefits.
  - a) Note that in previous recycling research we found that participants thought that a can would come back to life only as a can. In this program, participants and non-participants alike didn't seem to know what their food scraps will come back as.
- 8) Participants found ways to “line” their container either with paper bags or paper towels or milk cartons. Non-participants said they would be more willing to participate if they had a liner, although many wanted a liner that closed and sealed.

# Findings

- 9) Non-participants appear to have a somewhat schizophrenic attitude toward food, considering it “clean and healthy” when on one’s plate but “gross and unhealthy” when on it’s way to or in the trash.
- 10) Cleanliness and hygiene are major deterrents to participation for non-participants:
  - a) Cleaning the food waste and green waste bins was considered time-consuming and unpleasant;
  - b) “Rotting” food waste in the food waste bin was thought to be unhygienic.



# Findings

- 11) The lack of a consistent supply of green waste in the green waste can is a deterrent for non-participants and an annoyance for participants.
  - a) Significant quantities of green waste in the can to mix with food waste apparently keeps the can clean and keeps the food waste from smelling so bad (a natural liner).
  - b) There is also some reluctance to use the large green waste can exclusively for small amounts of food.
  
- 12) Participants and non-participants expressed concern about odor particularly during the hot summer months.

# Findings

- 11) The ability to put “food contaminated paper products,” in the food waste is an attractive feature, especially the ubiquitous “pizza box.” This was a less well-known feature.
  - a) The pizza box in particular seemed like something non-participants might try, essentially offering an “entrance” to the program.
- 12) Participants were shown printed material for the program and most remembered having seen it or retained the materials. Material recall/retention and the program’s high awareness suggest that the printed materials were effective.
  - a) When shown printed materials from San Francisco’s collection program, focus group participants expressed a preference for comprehensive material (the SF materials showed what was allowed in each of their three cans), and for more pictures/graphics.