

Inquiry into Waste Generation and Resource Efficiency  
Productivity Commission  
Locked Bag 2  
Collins Street  
East Melbourne 8003

As two very ordinary citizens with no waste or resource connections, other than as consumers, and one as a secondary teacher, we wish make the following points regarding lack of waste collection, and therefore resource inefficiency, with respect to greengrocer waste and schools.

### **1. GREENGROCERS, SUPERMARKETS, MARKETS**

The categories of waste that we see at greengrocers include

- i) green leafy waste from vegetables,
- ii) over-ripe fruit and vegetables,
- iii) cardboard boxes - waxed and unwaxed,
- iv) polystyrene trays and boxes. By law, the boxes can only be used once by the industry.
- v) Plastic sacks and large plastic bags.

The problems we see are:

- i) Their waste is not sorted at all.
- ii) It all goes to landfill (although some paper and cardboard is separated at the supermarket).
- iii) Landfill is fast becoming scarce and expensive to access, as well as being an environmentally unsound practice.
- iv) Our local councils offer retailers no waste collection services at all.

Our recommendations are:

- i) That greengrocers should be compelled to sort their waste.
- ii) They should be discouraged from using packaging which cannot be recycled **eg** polystyrene trays and boxes, waxed cardboard boxes, plastic film.
- iii) We believe that there should be a system for the collection of recyclable green waste from greengrocers, to compost and reprocess it and then return it to the farmers and market gardeners for **use** on their crops.
- iv) This service should be free (or at a minimal cost) for both the greengrocer and farmer. If such a system does not exist, it should be researched and developed.
- v) The current practice, which puts the onus on individuals and businesses to voluntarily reduce waste (as on the EcoRecycle Victoria website) and support recycling, should be replaced with formal, institutional, compulsory mechanisms which demand that they do so. Recycling of greengrocer waste should be easy, with no option to exclude your business, and should not be a financial burden on the business. It should be a matter of course for greengrocers to separate their waste for frequent collection.

The environmental benefits of such practice would be:

- less material to landfill,
- nutrients recycled back to the farmer and the land,
- less manufactured fertilizer needed at the farm,
- less energy needed for fertilizer manufacture, and
- therefore reduction in greenhouse emissions.

The economic benefits are possibly:

- lower cost to the farmer for the compost product,
- better use of landfill for waste which cannot go elsewhere,
- possible marketing of goods grown using this sustainable composting practice as a consumer incentive, and
- long term reduction in amount of greenhouse remediation activities necessary.

The social benefits could be:

- greengrocers and other retailers will know that *they* are contributing to a sustainable practice, as will farmers, as will consumers of the fruit and vegetables. We would be tapping into the desire of people to do the right thing - often underestimated by decision makers.

## **2. SCHOOLS, PARTICULARLY SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

- i) We want local councils to collect waste from schools. At the moment, students wanting to recycle cardboard, food waste, plastic bottles, cans, and recyclable glass must pay private companies to collect these materials, often at a considerable cost.
- ii) Schools have strict budgets and limited resources, and many cannot afford to pay these expenses.
- iii) Dealing with food waste on site is more difficult for secondary schools than for primary schools. Waste management is most often incorporated into the primary classroom routine. In secondary schools, activities such as composting are not included in the curriculum, and therefore must be done out of class time by often, very small bands of volunteer staff and students. Therefore, it generally does not happen.
- iv) Councils refuse to collect from schools, arguing that *they are* not ratepayers. However, the students are usually drawn from local rate paying communities, and so the waste generated in the school is part of the community's waste. There should be no distinction between schools, public and private, and households. If all councils collected waste from all schools, then all councils would cover all citizens.

Waste minimization should be a matter of community necessity, fully institutionalized and supported by all levels of government as a matter of course for all.

It should not be dependent on enthusiastic individuals who work voluntarily.  
We believe that there should be a change in the mindset of government, from the very top down.  
Our suggestions are a consequence of just two inefficient waste practices which we see every day as we go about our lives.

Yours faithfully,

Judith Evans and Jill Dumsday