

Household Food Waste Perceptions and Behaviors:

A Vermont Case Study

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Background

Vermont is among several New England states that have implemented policies to divert food waste from landfills at varying scales. In Vermont, all food waste will be banned from landfills by 2020, including from households, as signed into law under Act 148 in 2012. While elsewhere many municipalities have implemented policies at the household level, these are typically in large cities such as San Francisco. Since Vermont is the first state in the country to pass food waste legislation that includes households, it is an important area of focus to understand how households might respond to these changes. This research sought to explore how Vermonters perceive the issue of food waste, the Vermont food law, and the strategies Vermonters use currently and likely strategies in the future to comply with Act 148.

Data Collection

Data were collected by the Center for Rural Studies at The University of Vermont as part of the 2018 Vermonter Poll, a telephone poll conducted between February 20-February 26, 2018 of Vermont residents over the age of 18. A total of 583 Vermont residents participated, indicating this study has a margin of error +/- 4.1%.

Key Results

Knowledge and Perceptions of Act 148

- 71% of respondents were aware of Act 148 prior to the survey.
- Younger Vermonters and homeowners (74.9%) compared to renters (43.8%) were more likely to be aware of the policy
- The majority of respondents (56.1%) agreed to some extent that food waste should be banned from the landfill

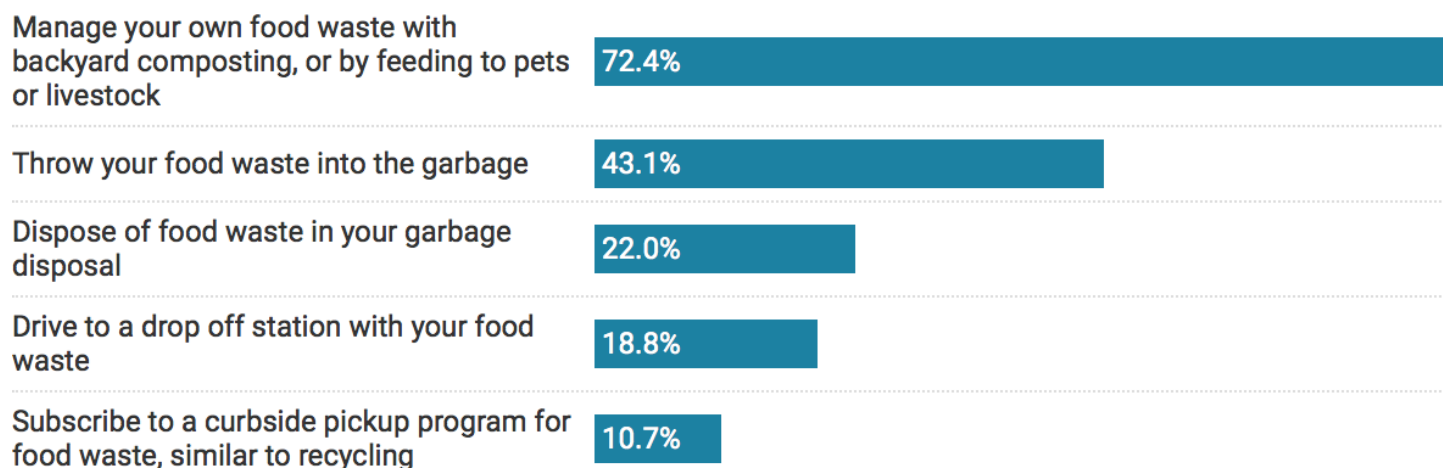
Current Food Waste Strategies

- Backyard composting or feeding food waste to pets or livestock was the most common food waste management strategy (72.4% of respondents), and this was more likely to be utilized by rural households
- Fewer than half of respondents (43.1%) are currently using the garbage to dispose of food waste, and this strategy was more common among renters
- The majority of respondents (83.6%) were using two or fewer strategies to manage their food waste currently

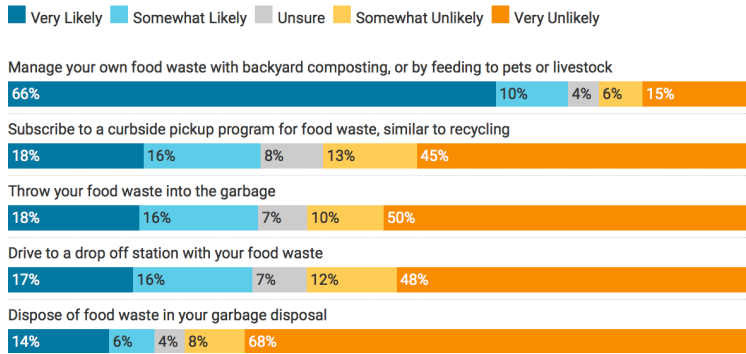
Future Food Waste Strategies

- The majority of respondents intend to manage food waste with backyard composting or feeding to pets or livestock in the future

Vermonters' Current Food Waste Strategies

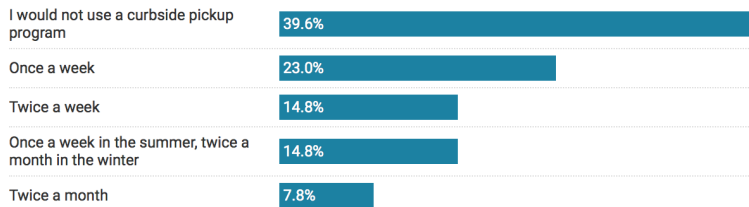


Future Food Waste Strategies



- Those currently using garbage are more likely to use other strategies in the future, but most respondents indicated they would continue to utilize current strategies in the future with Act 148.

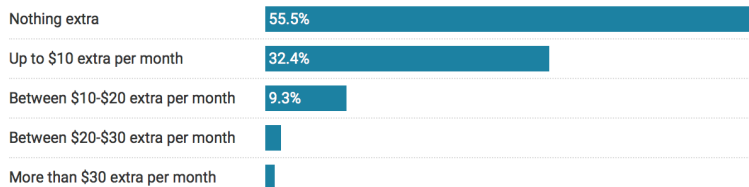
Future Use Curbside Food Waste Pickup



Use of Curbside Food Waste Pickup

- Nearly 40% of respondents indicated they would not use a curbside food waste pickup program. This was more likely among rural counties.
- Weekly pickup was the most desired frequency among respondents who may use a curbside pick up program
- The majority of respondents (55.5%) indicated they would be unwilling to pay any additional cost for curbside pickup.

Willingness to Pay for Future Use Curbside Food Waste Pickup



Business and Policy Implications

This data provides helpful insight in the current and potential future ways that Vermonters are managing their food waste. It suggests that the majority of Vermonters are implementing strategies currently that do not involve putting food waste into the

garbage, although 43% still utilize the garbage for food waste disposal. Backyard composting or feeding food waste to pets or livestock is an especially prominent strategy, which may be quite different than for other more urbanized regions with food waste policies. While many Vermonters expressed interest in curbside pickup programs for food waste in the future, 40% indicated they would not utilize this service. Further, the majority of Vermonters are unwilling to pay any additional cost for this service. As Vermont is a rural state, this lack of potential participation has implications for the cost and environmental efficiency of offering curbside pickup programs throughout the state, particularly in rural areas. Nevertheless, given the large number of Vermonters currently composting, these results suggest that additional education efforts towards residents about backyard composting may be important as more Vermonters continue the practice in the future. Finally, additional educational efforts about Act 148 overall may also be necessary as certain populations (older Vermonters and renters) appear to have much less knowledge about Vermont’s food waste legislation

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Additional Resources

- For more information on ROAR research visit <http://www.uvm-roar.com/>
- For more information on Act 148 visit : <http://dec.vermont.gov/waste-management/solid/universal-recycling>