



**Carolyn Browne Associates**

16820 NE 11th Place ■ Bellevue, WA 98008

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH  
LAKE FOREST PARK PARTICIPANTS:  
KING COUNTY FOOD WASTE RECYCLING PROGRAM**

**Conducted October 29, 2002**

**Summary Report**

*Prepared for*

**King County Solid Waste Division  
and  
City of Lake Forest Park**

*Prepared by*

**Carolyn Browne Associates  
16820 NE 11<sup>th</sup> Place  
Bellevue, WA 98008  
425-644-6820/FAX: 425-562-1935**

## Table of Contents

Background and Methodology .....	1
Significant Themes.....	2
Response Summaries from Focus Group Participants .....	4
Appendix:	
Tabulations from Questionnaires	
Discussion Guide	

**CITY OF LAKE FOREST PARK  
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CONCERNING  
THE PILOT FOOD WASTE RECYCLING PROGRAM  
OCTOBER 29, 2002**

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**

Sound Resources Management Group (SRMG) is working with King County and the City of Lake Forest Park on a pilot program of Food Waste Collection. SRMG contracted with Carolyn Browne Associates to conduct a focus group discussion with a representative group of participants in this Lake Forest Park pilot program to learn more about the habits and attitudes of those who have been doing food waste recycling for the last several months.

Discussion participants were recruited, at random, from the list of those who are part of the Lake Forest Park program. Consumer Opinion Services, a data collection firm in Burien, was responsible for recruiting the participants. Recruiters were instructed to seek a male or female head of household responsible for the food waste recycling. The recruiters were also asked to obtain at least three or four people having households with children under 18 years of age.

The discussion was held in a Conference Room of the Lake Forest Park City Hall, from 7:30 to 9:00 PM, on October 29, 2002. Carolyn Browne Tamler, principal of Carolyn Browne Associates, a Bellevue marketing research and community involvement consulting firm, facilitated the focus group.

This report includes summaries of the major themes from the discussion and the participants' comments. The participants in the discussion are referred to as "participants," or "program participants."

The opinions expressed throughout this report are those of the discussion participants. It should also be noted that the comments reflect individuals' perceptions of facts.

Although information obtained from focus group discussions is not statistically projectable, the responses and ideas from the participants do provide a representative portrait of the opinions of the population from which they were drawn – in this case, Lake Forest Park heads of households who have been participating in the pilot food recycling program.

## **SIGNIFICANT THEMES**

The greatest deterrents to fully participating in the food waste recycling program are lack of information about why the program is important and knowing how the recycled food waste is used. Only one person in the group had any idea of the way that the food waste is composted and used for other purposes. All agreed that providing education about the purpose of the program and how the food waste is recycled would encourage greater participation and support.

Based upon the responses and comments from the group, many of those in the pilot area have chosen to participate in a limited way, and some have decided to not participate at all.

Within the representative group of 11, four said they were totally satisfied with the program and are doing everything they can to fully participate. Their satisfaction is based, to a great extent, on having a recycling ethic. This program is seen as an important way of adding to the recycling they have been doing. Those who are satisfied with the program say they “love it” and are pleased to be able to have a place to recycle paper plates, napkins, pizza boxes, and other paper food wrappings.

Four members of the group are using the Compostainer for many of their food wastes, but have reservations and concerns about using the smaller kitchen container, knowing what waste should go into the Compostainer, or having to do what is required to fully participate in the program.

Three of the participants said they are not participating in the program in any way. They are adamant about the fact that they do not want to deal with food waste other than putting it down a garbage disposal or tossing it out with the rest of the trash. One person feels he already composts everything, so there is no food waste to be taken away.

In addition to the lack of information about the program’s purpose, there are other challenges with the program as it exists now:

- Odor and insect problems associated with the small kitchen container and with the Compostainer;
- Dissatisfaction with every-other-week pickup of trash;
- Confusion about whether two cans or a larger can may be used for trash pickup;
- A feeling that filling up a small kitchen container with food waste and transferring it to the larger Compostainer is a hassle and not convenient.

The most important ways to encourage greater participation in the food waste recycling program include:

- Educate the public about the program and what is done with the food waste;
- Resolve the problems of odors and insects;
- Have an incentive program or compensation for those who participate;
- Provide larger trash cans or two trash cans for those who need them.

## Response Summaries from Focus Group Participants

### PARTICIPANTS

The discussion participants were chosen, at random, from the list of 300 households participating in the pilot food recycling program. The 11 people who came to the discussion included four women and seven men ranging in age from late 30s to over 65. Five of the discussion participants have children under 18 years of age living at home.

Name	Years in Lake Forest Park	Occupation	Age Range	Children
John	20	Human Resources Manager	45 - 54	Yes
Kim	13	Home Maker	35 - 44	Yes
Kolden	22	Retired	65+	No
Mel	28	Semi-Retired/work at Albertson's	65+	No
June	25	Instructional designer	55 - 64	No
Jerry	11	Retired	65+	No
Dave	13	Real estate broker	45 - 54	Yes
Jeff	6	Aerospace engineer	35 - 44	Yes
Carol	36	Works for Unesco	55 - 64	No
Jeff	5	Owns stump grinding company	35 - 44	Yes
Ruth Anne	12	Retired	45 - 54	No

### INITIAL RESPONSE TO PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD WASTE RECYCLING PROGRAM

#### *First impressions*

While most of the people in the group are familiar with and supportive of recycling and composting, most said they were unfamiliar with food waste recycling prior to participating in this program.

Asked for their initial response to being in this pilot program, there were strongly divergent views. One man immediately responded, "I hated it. I don't do it; I don't use the container. There are only two in the house, so we don't need it." Another person quickly added, "It's the same for me." Others in the group said they love the program because it allows them to recycle more of their waste.

Some felt they were short-changed by having their weekly garbage pickup taken away. Another participant felt that since they already were putting everything in their own composter, this program did not provide any additional incentive.

Several (six in the group) started out using the small kitchen container, but quickly stopped because of problems with odor and inconvenience.

One person said they tried using the small kitchen container at first, but because of the odor and fruit flies, soon switched to using milk cartons that could be tossed in the Compostainer.

***Was it easy to understand what you were expected to do?***

People agreed that they had no problems with the new terms or understanding what they were expected to do in the program. Participants concurred that the information sent out was well written and explained everything clearly.

**COMPLYING WITH THE PROGRAM**

The participants were sharply divided between those who love the program and appreciate having a recycling method for disposing of food wastes, and those who are upset with what they see as more hassles and problems dealing with a new system of handling waste.

Those who appreciate the program say they use it a lot. For a minority of people in the group (about four of the 11) the program works very well. Some have stopped using their garbage disposals. One person said she no longer has to use her “slimy” worm bin. A mom of teenagers likes being able to toss pizza boxes into the Compostainer.

Those who do not like the program say that dealing with one more type of can takes too much time and trouble.

There was some confusion about whether an extra garbage can or a larger garbage can may be used for the every-other-week pickup. Several say they have too much trash for the single can. One person said he bought a second container the same size as his original garbage container because he believes using the two cans fits the rules of the program.

Six of the 11 in the group are not using the small kitchen container. For most, this extra container is not necessary and attracts fruit flies and leaves odors in the kitchen. One person said, “It’s one extra step that is not needed.” Another noted that the small container is “too small to handle a pizza box.” Some said they tried using the small container, but the smells were terrible (especially from chicken bones). Some noted that milk cartons can be used, or people can just wrap the food wastes in paper and dump them directly into the Compostainer.

**AWARENESS OF WHAT IS DONE WITH WASTE IN THE COMPOSTAINER**

Most of the participants had no idea what is done with the food waste after it is picked up. One person said, “I understood you made compost to sell commercially and use in the parks.” Another thought it was going in with the yard waste, but wasn’t quite sure what was done with the yard waste.

**THE CURRENT ROUTINE FOR DISPOSING OF FOOD WASTE**

The participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire where they could describe their current patterns for disposing of food waste.

***What goes in the Compostainer***

Most of the participants are using their Compostainer for most of their food waste.

Participants were asked to record how they disposed of their food wastes for the previous two days. Most (eight) indicated they used the Compostainer for fruit,

vegetables, meat and bones, and soiled paper and cardboard; seven put dairy products and bread and cereal in the special container. Most of those who did not use the Compostainer, placed the food waste in the garbage disposal or their garbage can; a couple of the participants also used a worm bin, or gave leftover meat and bones to a dog and leftover bread and cereal to chickens.

***What is your routine?***

Those who are fully participating in the program appear to have created simple patterns for disposing of the food waste. One woman says she takes out whatever is in the little container to the Compostainer when she gets the mail at night; on weekends, she adds the yard waste. A mother of teenagers noted that instead of having her children scrape their plates into the waste basket, they scrape them into the small container; after she is done with the dishes, she empties the small container into the Compostainer and then washes it. Others have developed a system for sorting their garbage.

Six of the 11 people do not use the small container, but some have come up with other systems that make use of the Compostainer. Some of those who do not like, or refuse to participate in the food waste recycling program, seem to have chosen not to participate because they feel that placing items in the small container is unacceptable to them.

***How did you know what was supposed to go in the Compostainer when you started the program?***

Participants agreed there was “no problem” understanding what was supposed to go into the Compostainer. All were very satisfied with the educational materials provided with the program. One person, an industrial designer, said, as a professional, she thought the materials very good.

One person was confused by the meaning of “soiled napkins.” He asked if that term included used Kleenex. Another person responded by saying that you’re not supposed to put anything like that in the container.

**WHAT WORKS WELL IN THE FOOD WASTE RECYCLING PROGRAM?**

Those who are fully participating in the program are very enthusiastic about its many benefits: “It has cut down on my garbage tremendously;” “It’s a great way to dispose of paper plates and pizza containers;” “I live in a small household and my wife and I had it down so that we only had our garbage picked up once a month, so now we get it picked up twice a month.” An older man, who did not have a garbage disposal when he was young, said that he got used to using paper bags and newspapers to wrap food waste; now, he finds he is doing the same thing and not using his garbage disposal much.

Someone else commented that he likes having extra yard waste pickup because he has a high volume of it. Another person added that she likes being able to recycle food waste instead of using her worm bin.

## **WHAT PROBLEMS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED WITH THE PROGRAM?**

The major problems cited with the program include:

- Dissatisfaction with every-other-week pickup;
- Problems with odors and flies;
- Perceived inconvenience of having to sort out the items to be recycling.

One man expressed his dissatisfaction with the every-other-week pickup noting, “My trash can is overflowing by the end of the second week.” A couple other participants also said they have too much trash by the time the pickup comes. Another person, who said he is often away from home, especially in the summer, worries about missing a week. He says that it is a hassle to work out arrangements with a neighbor to take care of the trash.

A woman who has pet cats said she would like an alternative for disposing of her two bags of used cat litter because they fill up the cans and leave very little space for other trash.

Most of the participants who do not like the food waste recycling program expressed their dissatisfaction by saying the program simply doesn’t work for their household. Some said they already compost most of their food waste. Others said they do not have much paper food waste. Several were not willing to have a “smelly” container in their kitchen or to deal with the odors and flies that were drawn to the Compostainer. Some said the program is just “too much bother.”

One person said he didn’t like the way the program was placed on people with no compensation. He believes there should be some reward or compensation for those who do the food waste recycling: “Shouldn’t we get a rebate on our garbage bill? I think if you want to sell this program to the larger population, there should be some incentive included with it.”

A couple of people said they feel that they got less garbage collection for the same price.

There was confusion about whether it is possible to use two cans, or have a larger can, to use for the every-other-week trash pickup. Some live in homes located up long, steep driveways; these participants expressed concern about the number of cans they have to haul to the curb for their pickup.

## **HOW IS THIS A GOOD PROGRAM/WHAT CAN MAKE IT BETTER?**

### ***Why would you say this is a very good program?***

Four members of the group raised their hands to affirm the food waste recycling program is “a very good program.” Their positive responses reflected their opinions that:

- It is good to recycle more things;
- It is part of our recycling ethic.

### ***What could be done to make the program better?***

There were several suggestions for improving the program:

- Provide larger garbage cans for the every-other-week pick up.

- Have some incentive or reward for those who participate; people would be more willing to participate if they can see some savings for their efforts. It takes time to recycle and to teach family members how to recycle.
- Educate people about the program's benefits. People need to know how the recycled materials will be used. Many can understand bottle and can recycling, but the benefits of food recycling may not be known. Promote other benefits, such as reduction in truck traffic (though some in the group had difficulty understanding why this would be so).

**CONCLUSION: WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT CHANGES, IMPROVEMENTS OR MARKETING IDEAS YOU WOULD IMPLEMENT TO MAKE THIS PROGRAM A SUCCESS?**

Ruth Anne:

- Retrofit people's kitchens, so that their garbage disposals send garbage to a recycling place.
- Have an informational fare in Lake Forest Park that explains the benefits of recycling.
- People need to be educated more about how to recycle, especially those in the older generations who did not learn recycling when they were young.

Jeff:

- Provide more education.
- Have weekly Compostainer pickup in the summer and fall to reduce flies and odors; in the spring and winter you can have pickups every other week or every 3 weeks.

Carol:

- Nothing would make the program workable for me because I have to haul the garbage cans a long way down a driveway; the fewer cans the better.
- Education might help others to participate.

Jeff:

- Have some sort of compensation for those who participate.
- I like Ruth Anne's idea of having an alternative to a disposal, like a vacuum waste system that we have on airplanes.
- Make it more convenient.
- Educate the public on the benefits of recycling and putting less stuff in landfills.

David:

- Do a better job of educating the public – why are we doing what we're doing?
- Garbage pickup was much more expensive in city than here – I think it's a bargain; people need to be educated about the deal they're getting; I'd rather pay less and take out my own cans.
- Provide compensation for those who recycle more.

Gerald:

- I don't have a problem with any of this; the system is OK.
- I believe in recycling; people need to be educated about it.

June:

- Have a deodorant for the kitchen container to reduce odors.
- Educate people about the expectation we recycle our own things and sell the benefits.
- (She added that she has ruined fewer utensils because she doesn't use her disposal any more.)

Melvin:

- There's not one thing you can do that will make me want to use the program. My wife will not have the small food waste container in the house; I'd rather take extra stuff to the transfer station.
- Education is the biggest way to get others to participate.

Kolden:

- He talked to his neighbors in two cul-de-sacs and the overwhelming response was, "It does not work for me." Lots of people said, "I hate it." He said they believe in recycling but they each gave a different reason for not liking this program:
  - Fruit flies and smells; doesn't use container in house.
  - Can't get kids to do it.
  - Program doesn't work for someone disposing of diapers.
  - I compost everything in my yard.
  - People don't like having a program forced on them by the city
  - Provide more education.

Kim:

- Provide more education.
- Put a deodorizer in the small container and a no pest strip in the Compostainer to get ride of the flies and odors.
- Let people use bigger garbage cans, if they want to.

John:

- Need something in container to reduce odor and flies.
- People should be able to use double-size containers for the same price for the every other week pickup.
- Give coupon for free trip to the dump once a year (like Seattle), in case a week is missed.

# **Appendix**

## **Tabulations from Questionnaires Discussion Guide**

**City of Lake Forest Park  
 Focus Group Discussion with Residents  
 Concerning Food Waste Recycling Program**

1. In the last two days, how did you dispose of the following foods wastes?  
 (Please put an “X” in all appropriate answers:

<b>Food Waste</b>	<b>Compostainer</b>	<b>Garbage Disposal</b>	<b>Garbage Can</b>	<b>Worm/ Compost Bin</b>	<b>Other</b>
Fruit	8	3	1	1	
Vegetables	8	3	1	2	
Meat & bones	8	1	4		Dogs
Dairy products	7	4	1		
Bread & Cereal	7	1	2	1	Chickens
Soiled paper/cardboard	8		5		

2. What has been the greatest difficulty in fully participating in the food recycling program?

- 5 Smells of containers
- 5 Fruit flies
- 2 No difficulties
- Don't participate in program
- Having to deal with a 4<sup>th</sup> can
- Cumbersome to separate food waste, use disposal as first choice
- Don't want extra container in the house, takes more time
- Do not like small container, prefer to use milk cartons
- Need weekly pickup in summer and fall
- Garbage can gets too full & smelly because of cat litter – I live alone & recycle most things
- Use my composter and garbage disposal exclusively; not enough other stuff to bother with. Also have a wood chipper.

3. How many people are in your household?

- 1 person - 2
- 2 people - 5
- 3 people - 3
- 4 people - 2

4. How many children under 18 are in your household?

5 of the 11 participants have at least one child in the household.

3 children - 1

2 children - 2

1 child - 2

5. Do you live in a single-family home, condominium, or apartment?

All live in a single-family home.

**City of Lake Forest Park  
Focus Group Discussion with Residents  
Concerning Food Waste Recycling Program  
October 29, 2002  
Discussion Guide**

- I. Introduction
  - A. Opening remarks - CB
  - B. Name, occupation, years living in Lake Forest Park
- II. What was your initial response when you learned you were selected to participate in a pilot program for food waste recycling?
  - C. Did you know anything about food waste recycling before you were notified that you were in this program?
  - D. Was it easy to understand what you were expected to do?
  - E. Are you comfortable with all of the new terms (ASK PEOPLE TO PROVIDE THEM....LOOK FOR COMPOSTAINER, SOILED PAPER, FOOD WASTE, ORGANICS, WET WASTES)?
  - F. Did you have any difficulties getting used to the new procedures?
  - G. Do you use the mini container? Is it necessary for your participation?
  - H. Do you understand what happens to the material in the Compostainer after it is picked up?
- III. Can someone give me an example of your routine now disposing of kitchen waste? Does anyone else have a different experience? (PROBE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP FOR THEIR INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES)
  - I. What are you putting in your Compostainer?
  - J. Is your routine the same every day and week, or does it depend on the garbage/collection schedule?
  - K. How do you know what goes in the Compostainer and what goes in the regular garbage?

- IV. Now that you have several months' experience with this pilot program....
    - L. What do you believe works well with this program?
    - M. What do you see as problems with the way the program currently operates?
  - V. So, let's see a show of hands....how many of you would say that this food recycling program is great?
    - N. (ADDRESSED TO THOSE WHO RAISED THEIR HANDS) What do think is great about the program? (LOOK FOR OVERALL BENEFITS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL, AS WELL AS THE COMMUNITY)
    - O. (ADDRESSED TO THOSE WHO DID NOT RAISE THEIR HANDS) What would it take to make you say this program is great?
  - VI. What could be done to make this program better and make people want to participate in it?
  - VII. (Summary): I would like to summarize by letting each of you imagine that you are in charge of the food waste recycling program for King County, and you have been given the responsibility, money and authority to make this program a success. I am going to go around the table and ask each of you to tell me the three most important changes, improvements or marketing ideas you would implement to make this program a success.
  - VIII. Explanation of take-home Food Waste Record.
- Thank you very much for sharing you ideas and opinions tonight.