

MEMORANDUM

WMPSC-C 23-2023

Subject: Ontario's Food and Organic Waste Policy Statement Update

Date: August 28, 2023

To: Waste Management Planning Steering Committee

From: Heidi Levitzky, Advisor, Waste Management Services

This memorandum is intended to provide Committee members with a status update of the [Provincial Food and Organic Waste Policy Statement, 2018](#) (the Policy Statement) that was issued on April 30, 2018.

Background

The Policy Statement identifies actions that municipalities, multi-residential buildings and some industrial, commercial, and institutional (IC&I) waste generators must take to reduce food waste and increase resource recovery from organics. It also includes targets to measure progress in the residential and commercial sectors. As reported to Council in 2018 ([WMPSC-C-28-2018](#)), staff participated in the original consultations on the Policy Statement. Niagara Region supported the implementation of the framework as an important step in reducing the amount of food and organic waste being generated and disposed of and was pleased to see some Region feedback incorporated in the document. The Policy Statement aligns with the Region's existing commitments and leadership on food waste reduction and diversion through our organics program.

[Proposed amendments](#) to the Policy Statement were posted for comment on the Environmental Registry on Sept. 30, 2020, with a comment deadline of November 14, 2020. It detailed what can be included in mandated organics diversion programs, including how compostable single-use packaging is to be managed. The proposed changes also put the onus on municipalities to work with other stakeholders to find solutions for managing these items in green bin programs. While Niagara Region was generally supportive of these amendments, key comments and recommendations were shared with the Ministry and reported to Council in 2020 ([PWC-C 43-2020](#)).

The key concerns are summarized below:

1. The province has not identified specific criteria or standards to place limits on producers who may move toward compostable packaging to avoid producer responsibility. The province still only encourages and not mandates that producers take responsibility for the *waste reduction* and *resource recovery* of the *compostable products and packaging* that is sold in Ontario. Establishing producer responsibility for management of compostable packaging must be a priority as producers continue to advertise products and packaging as compostable despite being incompatible with most green bin programs.
2. With respect to municipalities working with other stakeholders to find solutions for managing these items in green bin programs, upgrading existing facilities or designing new facilities to accommodate longer processing time while still managing a high tonnage of organics would be prohibitively expensive. It is not economically feasible to consider extending the retention time in existing facilities. Producers need to take responsibility for branded (i.e., non-food) organics instead of relying on municipalities to manage and implement technologies to handle this material. There are costs to municipal taxpayers for running pilot projects and implementing or upgrading technologies to handle compostable products and packaging. Municipalities must be fairly compensated for any additional costs related any new major costs, as a result of this Policy.

To date, the proposed amendments have not been finalized. The significant hurdle is the notion of designating certified compostable packaging and products for collection which is not compatible with the Region's Green Bin program, increases residue rates and fosters consumer confusion. Compostables are a relatively new and emerging waste stream, the result from growing interest in alternatives to single use plastics. However, their properties differ from other acceptable materials and require processing times two to three times longer to break down. There is broad recognition that more work needs to be done to better integrate these new types of products and packaging into Ontario's *circular economy*.

Another obstacle with respect to diversion targets laid out in the Policy Statement is that guidance to support measurement and achievement of the targets have not been made available. If the Policy Statement had been adopted, one sector-specific target would have applied to Niagara in 2023, prior to the other eight targets with 2025 timelines. This target is set at 70 per cent waste reduction and resource recovery of food and organic waste generated by low density residential dwellings (referred to a single family in the [Food and Organic Waste Framework](#)). Currently, Niagara Region provides

curbside food and organics collection service to low density residential properties and the program participation rate is estimated to be 47%. Guidelines for establishing a provincial baseline measurement used for measuring progress and other clarifications such as how prevention, rescue and recovery efforts can be counted towards the targets are essential to measure true progress.

Further, this proposal addresses just one of six recommendations from the Food and Organic Steering Committee and Technical Working groups that were established in 2019 (item 3 in the list of recommendations below). The government continues to assess how best to address the remaining recommendations and the path forward for compostables in the province.

1. Working with federal and provincial partners to examine the role of standards and certification, as well as the need for a new national standard and certification on compostables.
2. Working with our federal and municipal and industry partners to facilitate pilot testing in order to determine how compostables can be best managed in existing organic processing facilities.
3. Proposing to amend the Food and Organic Waste Policy Statement to clarify what types of materials, including compostables, should be collected by green bin programs and provide clear direction on the management of compostables.
4. Providing Guidance on the Food and Organic Waste Policy Statement in order to further reduce and divert food and organic waste and support the expansion of Green Bins across Ontario.
5. Reducing burden and modernizing environmental permissions to support organic processing. This in turn could help reduce and also mitigate costs for upgrading existing systems and investing in new technology to process compostables.
6. Considering options to ban food and organic waste from landfill as discussed in the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan and the Reducing Litter and Waste in Our Communities discussion paper.

Niagara Region's Position and Next Steps

Niagara Region continues to support the Policy Statement as an important step in reducing food and organic waste generated in our community and diverting this material from landfill. Niagara Region will continue to promote, collect, and expand the curbside

Green Bin/Cart program to low density residential properties, as well as, multi-residential and small to medium sized mixed use and IC&I properties.

Action item 9 of the Framework details a food and organic waste disposal ban that was to be phased-in beginning in 2022. A disposal ban on food and organic waste is expected to result in increased tonnages of food and organic waste collected at the curb and an associated increase in processing contract costs. However, the disposal ban is also expected to drive food waste prevention and other waste reduction initiatives which should offset increased processing costs. Niagara Region should plan and prepare for a ban in the years to come, as well helping local businesses comply with the new regulation particularly if a provincial-wide ban is initiated. Amending the Region's Green Bin program to allow compostable packaging and green procurement of compostable packaging internally are also likely actions Niagara Region will be tasked with at some point.

Staff will continue to show leadership in advocacy, policy development, support for innovative technologies and engagement with our residents and businesses to help find solutions, and consideration for actions will be included in the Waste Management Strategic Plan.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Heidi Levitzky
Waste Management Services Advisor

Referenced Links

[Provincial Food and Organic Waste Policy Statement, 2018](https://www.ontario.ca/page/food-and-organic-waste-policy-statement)

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/food-and-organic-waste-policy-statement>

[WMPSC-C-28-2018](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Waste%20Management%20Planning%20Steering%20Committee_Sep17_2018/Pages/VisitorView.aspx?itemID=14)

https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Waste%20Management%20Planning%20Steering%20Committee_Sep17_2018/Pages/VisitorView.aspx?itemID=14

[Proposed amendments](https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-2498)

<https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-2498>

[PWC-C 43-2020](#)

https://niagararegion.escibemeetings.com/Public%20Works%20Committee_Nov10_2020/Pages/VisitorView.aspx?itemID=21

[Food and Organic Waste Framework](#)

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/food-and-organic-waste-framework#section-1>