

+ Thursday 22nd August 2024

Indigo Regen Incorporated – a Community Composting project

Overall Summary

A proposal to Indigo Shire Council (ISC) Waste Management and Planning to reduce food waste going into landfill by supporting local households and cafes to convert food waste into compost.

Part of a sustainable circular economy to remove food waste from landfill and produce compost to improve our soil and grow food for the community.

A learning opportunity to educate local people to better understand the impact of food waste and how we can convert it into a valuable resource.

OUR PURPOSE;

In response to the challenges of the climate emergency, our vision is to create a safe place to grow food, learn about sustainable food growing practices, reduce food waste and promote social harmony and inclusion by building community capacity within the Indigo Shire.

We aim to create and celebrate local regenerative practices that nurture our earth, our communities, our bodies and our souls .

WHERE WE HAVE COME FROM SO FAR:

a) Our group began as a **local branch of Extinction Rebellion**, working on raising awareness of the climate emergency with protests and online actions with organisations such as Australian Conservation Foundation Albury Wodonga, Move Beyond Coal, Knitting Nanna's, Shut the Gate, Friends of the Earth, and local Landcare groups.

b) A subgroup created **Puppets for the Planet**, making giant puppets of our local endangered species including the Gang Gang Cockatoo, Pygmy Mountain Possum and the Bogong Moth. The puppets featured in local public events and photo shoots with FOE to bring public awareness to our threatened local wildlife throughout this climate emergency.

c) **Climate Adaptation** is currently our preferred response to the climate emergency in mitigating climate challenges. We explored a number of ways in which we might **act in our 'circle of influence' rather than our 'circle of concern'**. We focussed our priorities to 1. The impact of climate change and extreme weather events on the most vulnerable in our community 2. The 'cost of living crisis' post covid pandemic 3. Rescuing food waste from landfill

d) **Social housing** – We explored, through a number of meetings with the Uniting Church and Quercus, the possibility of addressing local housing insecurity. A site of interest is the land positioned at the rear of the Beechworth Uniting Church. Other sites were also identified but were not so well located close to town. Whilst our local church community were mostly supportive of the idea there remained some immediate administrative barriers to approval through State housing criteria and the Uniting Church Synod. We recognise a program of this magnitude is best managed through organisations such as Beyond Housing, but we would like to continue to advocate for those living with housing crisis.

e) **Community garden** – In response to food insecurity we decided upon a community garden to build community capacity to grow food and connection. Quercus Garden remains an ideal partner in

building community through learning, sharing and growing, and they already have a connection and respect within our community. Members are encouraged to volunteer with the Quercus Beechworth Community Garden in the meantime to build relationships and knowledge. Other recognised sites were the rear of Beechworth Uniting Church, rear of Mens Shed, random vacant private land and also unused land within the Shire. Anne and Bernie, Chris, Kerrie, Tom and Lesley visited Wangaratta Community Garden to investigate the value of such a community project. Other Community Gardens using other models were visited by others.

f) Beechworth Urban Landcare Sustainability - We identified local landcare groups (BULS, Wooragee, WRENS in Wodonga and WATCH) as good partners for learning, sharing and mentoring our group. We arranged a meeting with BULS who were very receptive to our community garden initiative and offered support in kind, but also in auspicing our group if required for community activities.

g) Plant Based Treaty – Anni Turnbull has spoken to Indigo Shire on the importance of the PBT which is designed to put food systems at the forefront of combating the climate crisis. Modelled on the popular Fossil Fuel Treaty, the treaty aims to halt the widespread degradation of critical ecosystems caused by animal farming and promote a shift towards healthier, sustainable plant-based diets.

h) Composting – To address Food Waste and Food Insecurity through understanding the impacts of Waste Management, Green House Gases and Community Capacity Building and Engagement. FOGO (green bin) disposal, Indigo Shire Council (ISC) Waste Management Strategy (due for review end 2024), Indigo Environment Advisory Committee (register for nomination to group if a position is available), HalveWaste, BinTrim and NEWA (North East Waste Alliance in Benalla) are all opportunities for partnership in managing food waste.

OUR RESEARCH SO FAR

'In 2018 – 2019, 7.6 million tonnes of food were wasted in Australia or an average of 312 kg per person was wasted that year.

In terms of economic loss, this equates to \$19.3 billion and an average of \$2000 – \$2500 per household being lost every year. The irony of Australia's food waste problem is that half a million households experience food scarcity every day due rising costs of living. And 8-10% of greenhouse gas emissions are from food waste. This makes it a significant contributor to the climate crisis.'

The Australia Institute

THE PROBLEM (& BENEFITS) WITH FOOD WASTE

- To identify food waste management programs implemented in the past and why they failed
- To understand the amount of food waste created in each household, currently estimated at 312kg per person annually.
- To understand the quantity of organic waste generated by cafes. Currently considered to be 62% food waste and 18% cardboard/paper. That is 1.7 cubic metres organics per 1 cubic metre of floor space per year. It is therefore determined that cafes could reduce their waste by 80% if they divert these two waste streams of food and cardboard. Most around us may already divert cardboard/paper (NSW EPA)
- 50-60kg of raw organic waste becomes 5-6kg of compost.
- 1kg food waste equates to 3kg reduced carbon emissions
- Problems with organics contamination happen with food packaging. And that can occur with how a cafe presents its food on the plate ie, baking paper wrapping burgers.
- It is considered that a weekly organic waste removal is necessary to prevent odour issues but it may be more often in summer.

- All Beechworth's FOGO goes to Wagga where it is heated up to 80 degrees Celsius to kill the pathogens, animal faeces and other toxic matter.

HOW TO MANAGE FOOD WASTE THROUGH COMPOSTING:

As a community group we aim to reduce food waste and their carbon emissions through education, community engagement, sustainable food systems, and its final stage of compost for producing good soil to produce good food. This creates an ideal **Circular Economy** from food waste to soil to food production in a safe place of learning and sharing. Identified sites for compost storage and development would include Quercus Community Garden, domestic compost enclosures, Shire land, Schools and Beechworth Health Service. Through education and inclusion we aim to galvanise the community to manage food waste in their home and business to create stronger community networks and healthier communities. Key actions would include ;

- Encourage Indigo REGEN members to produce their own domestic compost storage and worm farms to fully understand the process of food composting, its difficulties and triumphs.
- Engage local cafes (see list attached) to reduce their carbon emission by managing their food waste locally.
- To begin with a pilot program on a single café to assess the resources required ie additional bins?, storage in cafes?, volunteers to sort and separate, waste delivered off site for processing.
- Assist local cafes to sort their food waste and increase productivity and profits by managing it sustainably.
- Recycle food waste into valuable soil to grow plants and edible food in Quercus community garden
- Support a circular economy in managing carbon waste through to compost. A program called **BinTrim** is run by NSW EPA
<https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/working-together/grants/business-recycling/bin-trim-grants>.
 This program allows for free bin assessments for commercial food premises. There are a number of news stories as examples on NSW EPA website. This program would apply to Beechworth as its waste goes to a NSW landfill. There is an app to help with self assessment but physical assessment is also available free of charge.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

- Have a community meeting to identify the needs and expectations of the community.
- Recent surveys have demonstrated that our community would prefer to manage food waste locally and this is an opportunity to equip them with the skills to do so.
- Educate the volunteers and community through workshops and demonstrations.
- Understand how to use the recycle bins most efficiently and effectively.
- Visit, chat and do brief waste analysis with cafe/restaurants. They will know what they produce.
- Look at any packaging issues, how homes and cafes can remove uncompostable items from organic waste.
- Look for compostable (paper) alternative packaging if necessary
- Examine different processing options and grant opportunities for those options

- Determine if composting benches will be adequate to deal with waste generated, and do the community want them?
- There are also grants available through **NSW EPA** for organic waste to landfill diversion, FRRR, Indigo Shire, Bendigo Bank.
- Identify sites for offsite processing to include Quercus, Shire land ie tip,

POTENTIAL NETWORKS

Continue to explore links to other community garden groups and permaculture principals of 'observe and interact' through established organisations [Guide - Getting Started with Permaculture Living \(milkwood.net\)](#). Create compost to achieve the aim of producing good soil to produce good food to create good community networks.

- **Nundle Community Garden** <https://nundle.com.au/nundle-community-garden/>
- **Milkwood** permaculture <https://www.milkwood.net/>, and **Helen McPherson Community Garden Manual** (see manual attached)
- Research models on managing food waste in cafes around Australia and waste management in general – **BinTrim Networks Program** NSW EPA <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/working-together/grants/business-recycling/bin-trim-grants>
- Create relationship with local waste management initiatives through **Indigo Shire** <https://www.indigoshire.vic.gov.au/Residents/My-Property/Bins-rubbish-and-recycling> **HalveWaste** Albury <https://halvewaste.com.au/>, <https://www.alburycity.nsw.gov.au/services/waste-and-recycling>
- **Cool Seat** (an odorless composting bin within a wicker garden) <https://www.coolseats.com.au/> which could be introduced into the community or as a feature in the Quercus garden. See also composting benches at HalveWaste

OTHER RESEARCH LINKS AND ARTICLES

<https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/recycling-and-reuse/business-government-recycling/business-program/bin-trim-business-stories/circular-cafes-shiny-brew> -

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=9Mbjjluy1wQ&si=99XBT2RdomZ1HiMu> - Bega circular economy as featured on ABC Landline TV program