

A FAIRER FUTURE

Fairfield RSL is taking important steps to ensure a greener future for the planet and to help ward off hunger among Sydney homeless. It's all part of a long-term campaign to green the Club.

A leftover bread roll, some uneaten lettuce leaves, a heap of meat scraps, a plate of cold chips. These might sound like the remnants from any meal at any club, anywhere. But at Fairfield RSL, they now represent something completely different.

Rather than simply being scraps destined for the rubbish bin, and in turn, a problem that ends up in the city's landfill dumps, these dinner-plate leftovers now represent a greener future for Sydney.

Hard to believe? Well, believe it. Because at Fairfield RSL, a food revolution has been taking place, and it's all about eliminating waste and securing a more sustainable future for the planet.

In mid-2019 Fairfield RSL introduced the ORCA food waste system. The ORCA technology mimics the natural digestion process, creating a biological environment for microorganisms to digest food waste into a liquid. Using mostly air, along with water and microbiology, food waste is turned into an environmentally safe liquid that goes down the drain, being disposed of using existing sanitary sewer infrastructure. The process significantly reduces both landfill and harmful emissions along with significant cost savings from reduced truck and bin collection systems.

The amount of food set for recycling under this change is mind boggling.

In the first six months since installing the ORCA the Club has already converted over 13 tonnes of food waste. More incredibly, over the next 12 months, it is expected that a mighty 30 tonnes of pure food waste will be diverted from landfill, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing the Clubs waste disposal.

For Fairfield RSL chief executive officer Anthony Sobb, the move to recycling unwanted food waste from the Club has a two-fold impact - not only does it result in reducing green house gases and keeping waste out of landfill dumps, where it can take decades to break down. It also reduces the Club's waste disposal costs.

Mr Sobb says he was inspired to make the changes after watching the Anthony Bourdain documentary Wasted! The Story of Food Waste.

"As an organisation, we have always had an ethos towards responsibility and towards reducing our carbon footprint of our environment in general," Mr Sobb says.

"However, the 'light switch' moment in relation to waste management occurred after viewing the Anthony Bourdain documentary Wasted. It had a dramatic and immediate effect on me.

"When you consider it takes 25 years for a head of lettuce to decompose once placed in a landfill environment you really do have a new perspective on what becomes of our food."

The scheme is part of an ongoing commitment by the RSL to move to a more sustainable future that dates back to 2012 when the Club first installed a set of four beehives onto the rooftop to start generating honey. Since then, a number of important strategies have been introduced to eliminate waste, reduce the carbon footprint of the Club and lessen food miles.

These include the 2013 introduction of the “Secret Garden” on the rooftop that produces more than 30 varieties of herbs and fruit. The creation of an onsite compost heap that takes a whopping 1040kg of organic matter a year and the installation of worm farms to power the compost heaps, with the more than 2000 worms onsite producing 1.5 litres of worm solution per week, which is in turn used in the herb gardens.

As well as these initiatives, there has also been a steady introduction of environmentally friendly policies including recycling used products like paper, glass, computers, devices and printer toners, reducing a reliance on utilities including gas, electricity and water, placing sensor lighting in areas such as bathrooms, and encouraging staff to turn off the power when not used through a “lights out” program.

Most of the changes are simple but elegant solutions that prove highly effective at reducing waste and improving the environmental responsiveness of the Club.

Mr Sobb says the most exciting part of using ORCA for recycling is that it will help make a reality of the Club’s desire to achieve a goal of zero food being sent to landfill.

“Simply put, our strategy is to have zero food placed into landfill,” he says, noting that the Club already had a strict policy of separating raw vegetables and organic kitchen scraps into separate bins for composting.

“Raw vegetable scraps and eggshells are taken to our large rooftop composting bins (alongside our worm farm, commercial herb garden and four beehives),” he explains. *“Kitchen meat offcuts and other foods such as inedible food waste from customers returning to the kitchen are placed in the ORCA where they are broken down and converted to liquid.”*

Even the remnants of used coffee grinds are reused in our rooftop composting.”

“This will not only be a big help to people in our neighbourhood but to hungry people all over Sydney,” Mr Sobb says.

“We are always looking at creating new strategies to support our organisation’s vision statement, ‘Service to others is the rent we pay for our room here on this earth’,” he says. *“For the moment it’s all about ensuring not one morsel of food reaches landfill.”*

Mr Sobb concludes that the Club is pleased to meet its obligations to society and the environment by embracing sensible yet innovative changes.

“Sustainability and the protection of our environment is an individual, communal and global responsibility,” he says.

“For organisations such as ours that have a high turnover, and that are oriented towards food and beverage, it’s imperative to make some environmental changes. High usage equates to high accountability and responsibility.”

“We’ve been given this earth on-loan only, it belongs to the future generations.”