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Dartmouth Food Festival Plastic and Waste Policy

Aim of the policy

To inform festival traders, visitors and our towns people about the waste and pollution problem plastics, in particular, have become and to encourage the use of alternatives wherever possible. Whilst recycling has a part to play, it is **not** the answer to the plastic problem.

Waste management is integral to a responsible plastic policy. We aim to increase the amount of waste that we send for composting and reduce the amount that is sent to incineration and are working with our waste contractor for zero to landfill. This will require the public to buy into our goals and we hope traders at the DFF will help us in this.

Before skipping to the policy please read the following short description of what we believe is the current state of knowledge and practice.

What is the problem with plastic bags, cups, straws, containers and other types of packaging?

Plastic is so cheap we throw it away. On average, we use a plastic bag for 12 minutes before getting rid of it. We used to think that plastic waste was just a nuisance, simply requiring responsible citizens to not litter the streets or countryside. We now know plastic causes biological harm, kills wildlife and is massively polluting our oceans. The harm to mankind of micro-plastics entering the food chain is currently unknown but the demonstration of them contaminating fish meat and even human brain tissue is frightening. A further problem is that plastic manufacture adds to global warming, currently accounting for 20% of petroleum production. It is expected for this to increase still further despite a recent reduction in the use of single use plastics.

The BBC Blue Planet 2 documentary was a “wake up” call. We have since lost our love affair with plastic, or at least the unnecessary use of plastic, and want our governments to act and our supermarkets and food producers to “up their game” regard-

ing plastic. The petrochemical and food industries have successfully laid the blame on the consumer for the environmental mess they have caused and have saddled governments around the world with the responsibility for waste collection and recycling. The tables are about to turn. We can change our habits and we will bring pressure on the food industry (and others) to change.

Are there "environmentally friendly" plastics?

Bioplastics are made from corn starch, derived from fermenting corn husks. The resulting polylactide acid (PLA) looks and behaves like polyethylene and polypropylene and is increasingly being used by the food industry in packaging and containers. PLA manufacture uses one third the energy needed to make traditional plastic and they do not release CO₂ when they break down. They are a step in the right direction but a major problem is they look similar to petro-chemically made plastic and should be composted, not put in recycling or general waste bins. Their similarity to normal plastic bags is their biggest problem and will require the public to become better informed.

Biodegradable plastics have recently been introduced into supermarkets and shops. They sound like a good alternative but are not. The only difference from regular plastic is that they decay more rapidly in the presence of light and oxygen (and moisture and heat). They are still made of normal (petrochemical) plastics and don't break down into harmless substances. Manufacturers portray biodegradable plastic as a magic-bullet solution but the drawbacks are often not fully appreciated by the retailers who use them. Worse still they often have impressive sounding logos printed in green ink to give the appearance of being "eco-friendly" (called greenwashing) but produce methane gas as they decompose in landfill and only decompose rapidly in industrial machines that operate at high temperature and provide enough oxygen. Some degrade into micro-fragments or leave toxic residues. And, as stated above, bioplastics and biodegradable plastics should not be put in the same waste bins and yet they look the same. Accordingly biodegradable plastics are **not** the answer.

Sustainable and responsible.

These are two of DFF's guiding principles.

Plastics cannot be recycled in the way glass or metal can. A clear plastic bottle cannot be made into another bottle without mixing with newly made plastic and much recycling is into lower grade plastic, like food trays, and after that as bulking agents in the construction industry. The economics of recycling make it more expensive than new plastic. It is difficult to sort the clean from the dirty, the recyclable from the general waste. As a result, much potentially recyclable plastic goes to incineration or landfill and only 10% is recycled. So the answer is "use less plastic".

For the organizers of food festivals, ensuring a separation of food waste from other compostable materials like bioplastic, wooden/paper or cardboard plates and cutlery and containers is difficult. Separating these from other waste, like coffee cups or drink containers, is even more so. It is a “can of worms”, pun intended. So this year we are working with our waste management company to keep it simple and having off site sorting of waste to extract recyclable plastic, cardboard, glass and metal tins.

We also aim this year for useable unsold food to go to food banks or appropriate charities and will let traders know how this will work in due course. Surplus food that is unsuitable for consumption we plan to get composted and not go into general waste. Arrangements for the collection of this are currently being formulated.

Requirements for DFF traders

- No single use plastic bags to be issued. Festival goers will be encouraged to use “bags for life” and traders must only use **paper or Bioplastic** wrapping for all merchandise including food items not intended for on-site consumption.
- No plastic “biodegradable” bags to be issued.
- No plastic or polystyrene cutlery or drink containers are to be used unless such clear plastic items (eg for beer) are part of a recycling deposit scheme approved by DFF in advance.
- Traders selling food for intended immediate consumption must use compostable serve-ware and cutlery.
- Coffee/tea traders are requested to offer a discount to members of the public who re-use a drink container they provide. As there are no compostable non plastic hot drink containers currently available*, such items will need to go into the general waste for incineration unless individual traders choose to dispose of their own.
- No plastic disposable drink bottles are permitted to be sold at the event.
- Sugar, salt & pepper and sauces must be available in large refillable dispensers or individual paper sachets.
- No plastic straws will be permitted.

* Please let us know if you are using non plastic containers that can go into domestic composting.

We appreciate that rules on plastic use and waste management differ between food festivals and that they are constantly changing. We would appreciate your feedback and questions so please contact us. We want to work with you to achieve our aims.

1. Bottled drinks

We again have a ban on all drinks (including water) being sold in single use plastic bottles *including biodegradable plastic*. We encourage festival visitors to bring their own refillable water bottles and will have free water refill facilities around the town.

2. Ban of single use plastic bags

This is our second year in which single use plastic is banned.

3. Serve-ware & packaging policy

Serve-ware policy

All serve-ware including cutlery, plates and meal boxes must be compostable. No “biodegradable” plastic to be issued.

Please note that serve-ware will be checked during the Festival.

Permissible serve-ware:

- Wooden or Bioplastic cutlery – spoons, forks and knives
- Compostable paper and cardboard cups
- Compostable paper or wooden plates, bowls and take-away containers
- Wooden stirrers
- Compostable PLA glasses

The following serve-ware types will NOT be acceptable:

- Expanded polystyrene
- Plastic cutlery
- Plastic single sachet servings of salt, pepper, sugar or sauces
- Plastic straws
- Disposable plastic bottles and drink containers (unless part of a deposit recycling scheme)

Packaging Policy

Traders wrapping or providing bags for purchases, including food to take home, should only use compostable or approved recyclable material:

- Paper and cardboard are the preferred materials.
- No single use plastic is permitted.
- PLA Bioplastic is permitted but should only be used for food items bought to take away from the festival.

4. Recycling food items

We are currently working on the practicalities of dealing with surplus food that could be distributed to food banks. Details will be made available in due course.

5. Food waste.

We know traders do not intend to have surplus food that is no longer suitable for human consumption but this is sometimes unavoidable. We are investigating the optimal use of this type of waste and full details will be made available in due course.

We honestly value feedback on our policy and are open to Traders suggestions.

Please get in touch at office@dartmouthfoodfestival.com