

# Food Waste – FAQs

## **What's new?**

Residents can now reuse their old plastic bags such as bread bags, frozen food bags and cereal bags as liners in their food waste caddies.

## **What type of bags should I use?**

Wherever possible please use food waste bags provided by the authority (either the current starch bags or the new plastic bags which are due to replace the starch ones very soon).

In the event that a resident should run out, they may reuse old plastic bags. Suitable examples include bread bags, sandwich/freezer bags or thin carrier bags (please do not use the thick 'bag for life' type bags).

Residents should avoid 'double bagging' of the food waste and should not include rigid plastic containers.

## **What are the benefits?**

We hope that this will help more residents recycle their food waste more easily. It also saves people the effort of getting council supplied bags and gives another use to bags which might have otherwise ended up as rubbish.

## **Why have you changed things?**

Anaerobic digestion is the preferred option of the Welsh Government because it is so much more efficient. Traditional composting produces a similar product but without the electricity generation. It also allows the separately collected garden waste (with no food) to be composted on local farms – further reducing the cost of processing and keeping this stream local.

Monmouthshire is working in partnership with neighbouring local authorities to send our food waste to a regional food waste facility in Bridgend.

## **How does the new process work?**

Anaerobic digestion mimics the working of a cow's gut. Food is digested in giant tanks using natural bacteria and the methane gas produced is captured (unlike the cow!) and burnt to generate electricity. A by-product of this process is a rich fertiliser which is used to spread on local farmland.

## **How much energy is generated at the anaerobic digestion plant?**

The Bridgend facility produces enough electricity to power a town the size of Abergavenny, Chepstow, Monmouth or Caldicot.

## **Why is it now ok to use plastic bags as food waste liners?**

Monmouthshire's food waste was previously sent for 'in vessel composting' where the corn starch food waste bags could be fully composted as part of the process.

However, the anaerobic digestion process is very different to composting and cannot deal with any type of food waste bag - so they are removed before the digestion process begins.

## **What happens to the bags?**

Once removed, the bags are then squeezed dry and sent to Cardiff's 'energy from waste plant' to produce more electricity.

**Will I still be able to get council food waste bags?**

Yes, food waste bags will still be available from Community Hubs. The new bags will look the same as the old ones but will be made from recycled plastic.

**I've still got old council food waste bags left – can I still use them?**

Yes, it makes sense to use up your old food waste bags wherever possible.

**Is it still ok to put in kitchen roll/paper in the food waste caddy?**

Yes, it's fine to carry on putting kitchen roll/paper in your food waste caddy.

**Can I line my caddy with paper bags or newspapers?**

Yes, it's fine to use paper bags or newspapers instead of a bag to line your food waste caddy.

**Do I still have to remove any plastic packaging from my food waste?**

If the food waste is in a plastic bag (such as an old bag of potatoes or bread) there is no need to remove it. Other packaging such as food trays must be removed.

**Aren't compostable bags better?**

Compostable bags require air and light to help break them down. The anaerobic digester operates in the dark and in the absence of air so cannot process compostable bags. All bags are separated from the food and burnt to produce electricity. So, ideally we would like to see all those old plastic bags being re-used rather than expensive compostable bags. Compostable bags are also more difficult for the plant to separate as they sticky when warm.

**How does this fit with Monmouthshire working towards plastic free status?**

In June 2018, Monmouthshire pledged to become a 'Plastic Free Council'. So, we are trying to reduce our own use of single use plastics whilst encouraging our residents to do the same. However, when it comes to food waste recycling, reusing old plastic bags that might have ended up as rubbish, seems to make sense. Reusing the bags in this way can save time, money and resources. After being used as food waste caddy liners they will be sent to an energy from waste plant in Cardiff plant where they are used to generate electricity.

**Can I put fat, oil and grease in my food waste caddy?**

Yes, small amounts of fat, oil and grease can go in. Kitchen paper can help soak up small amounts. Large amounts of cooking oil can be taken to Five Lanes or Llanfoist household waste recycling centres. Never pour these down the sink.