

please note the plastic bags may vary from final layout



Left: Fence posts used in the hurdles and vineyards.

Below: Lyn Mayes and the veg garden.



“The beauty is our collection partners are social enterprises, which fits nicely with our ethos. Kilmarnock employs people with disabilities, as does Abilities our collection partner in Auckland, along with Earthlink, who employ those who otherwise struggle to find work.”

And while most post-consumer plastics are destined to become FuturePost posts, the new collection service launched recently in the garden department at The Warehouse in Hastings shows how soft plastic bags from compost and potting mix can also be recycled into a garden bed frame.

“This launch showed The Warehouse customers what a circular economy looks like.”

Lyn says there is also a huge potential market for post-industrial soft plastics.

“There are more options here because post-industrial soft plastics tend to be a single polymer – a single plastic resin type – which makes it a lot easier to recycle than the mix of plastics that comes through from post-consumer recycling.”

“We are also seeing a lot of interest from councils wanting to get behind the programme – we had two local mayors at our Hawkes Bay launch. They can see the benefits of the scheme, both for them, by reducing the amount of kerbside waste collection, and for the public, as it meets the sustainability and environmental goals many people strive for.”

“Ultimately success comes from government, industry, and the community working together to improve our recycling rate. We certainly encourage councils to promote the Soft Package Recycling Programme to their communities.” **LG**

The soft plastics recycling scheme is not only back, but recycling more waste plastic than ever, transforming it into fence posts and other useful products, and helping ease the load on rubbish collection and recycling services.

A single FuturePost fence post is produced from around 1500 plastic bags and wrappers, and the company is now churning out 800 posts daily; that’s 1.2 million bags recycled every day.

“I think there has been some concerns from the public that recycling doesn’t actually happen here in New Zealand. But it most definitely does,” says scheme manager Lyn Mayes.

In 2018, soft plastics collections were halted as overseas markets for the waste product dried up. Since then, however, recycling locally has stepped up, and is more efficient than ever.

“We use ‘just in time’ logistics. Soft plastics are collected from the recycling bins, made into bales, and taken to FuturePost to be recycled. There’s nowhere in the chain that’s holding onto plastics.”

“We monitor the plastic the whole way through the cycle too – recording tonnes in and posts out, and if consumers do their job and ensure the waste soft plastics that go into our bins are clean and dry, they will definitely be recycled.”

That’s another area of concern for the public – they assume that often dirty plastics will contaminate a whole bin, meaning it can’t be recycled and is sent to landfill instead. However, Lyn says contamination is minimal.

“Because people usually collect a whole pile of soft plastics at home before popping them into one of our bins, they ensure they’re clean to stop them smelling while they’re storing them.”

“What’s more, they often stuff a whole house load of plastics into one bag – a bread bag or the like – and so the

bins get filled with bags of clean, soft plastics. As a result, contamination in our bins is less than seven percent.”

Often, to help prevent people using the bin for rubbish, stores will place a general rubbish bin next to the recycling bin or monitor them to deter misuse. This has proven so effective, that Lyn says the biggest contaminant is now compostable bags.

Things are going very well for the scheme, to the point they’re actively calling for the public to recycle their soft plastics as they have a very real use for it.

“In mid-2019, we recycled 10 tonnes a month, now FuturePost can recycle 90 tonnes-plus of our soft plastics, and is putting a second production line in that will increase its capacity next year to 200 tonnes per month.”

“This means we’re increasing our collection service – more bins in our current locations and we’re expanding into new regions as well, although logistics are an issue in some places.”

Collections have resumed in Christchurch, however, where the service had to be suspended two years ago because there are no soft plastic recyclers in the South Island.

“The issue is getting the plastic up to Auckland.”

Fortunately, Goodman Fielder, which is a founding member of the Soft Plastics Recycling Scheme, has stepped up with a simple yet ideal solution. Its regular routes see empty trucks returning from Christchurch to Auckland, so offered to transport the bales north for us.

“The soft plastics is collected from stores by Kilmarnock Enterprises, and then baled and palletised ready for transport.”