

Journey To Zero Waste

A farmers market's efforts to
reduce waste and build a
community of sharing



Executive Summary

Withrow Park Farmers' Market (Withrow Market) is a sustainable farmers' market that operates every Saturday morning, from June to mid October, at the Withrow Park in east end Toronto.

In 2016, staff and volunteers calculated that the market served approx. 1,690 single use coffee cups during the market season and estimated that over 10,000 single use items were being wasted. We needed to do better.

Beginning in 2017 and each subsequent year, Withrow Market has introduced zero waste initiatives, including:

- Replacing disposable coffee cups with reusable coffee mugs in 2017
- Encouraging patrons to bring their own mugs and containers
- Launching our zero waste station in 2018, which included cutlery, plates and bowls for the other prepared food vendors
- Partnering with companies to offer insulated beverage cups, take-out containers and plates for food consumed at the park

In addition, Withrow Market has promoted repair, rehome and other circular economy initiatives, including:

- Becoming the first farmers' market in Toronto to create a "Zero Waste Guideline" for vendors
- Giving preference to local artisans who produce natural, upcycled, eco-friendly, and sustainable products
- Supporting the repair and swap movement by hosting workshops and events
- Hosting winter clothing drives for newcomers to Canada
- Collecting end-of life batteries and pens/markers for proper recycling
- Partnering with CASE to reuse black plastic takeout containers

Through our efforts, Withrow Market surpassed its 2018 impact and continued the momentum with a total of 10,000 single-use items being diverted from becoming waste in 2019. In addition, in 2021, the Market generated 40 large bags of takeout containers collected. Approx 880 lbs of plastic saved to be recirculated.

We have proven that a little effort, goes a long way!

It Takes a **Community** to Build a Market

Withrow Park Farmers' Market is a sustainable farmers' market that operates every Saturday morning, come rain or shine, from the beginning of June to mid October, located at Withrow Park in the Riverdale/Greektown neighbourhood of Toronto, Ontario. The farmers' market is coordinated by a market manager and is supported by a team of volunteers and local residents wanting to enhance their community and support local farmers, food producers, and artisans. In addition to the outside vendors that attend, Withrow Market's volunteer team operates a coffee station.

Operating since 2006, Withrow Market's vision is a local sustainable economy that strengthens community connection and environmental stewardship.



As part of Withrow Market's 15th anniversary celebrations, the market refreshed its branding and logo. To demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and their journey towards waste reduction the new logo features circular elements incorporated into the "O".

Getting to Know Us

Withrow Park Farmers Market averages between 25 to 35 vendors on any given week. Although there is a core group of vendors that attend all season long, Withrow Market also has a rotating roster of part-time vendors. Vendors at Withrow Market include farmers, prepared food vendors, wineries, breweries, and craft artisans with a range of products from fruits and veggies to wine, beer, cider, cheese, meats, baked goods, preserves, hot prepared meals and more.

Beyond a farmers market with vendor stalls, Withrow Market also hosts live music, kids crafts, non-profit organizations and special events like bike repairs and clothing swaps.



In 2022, the market had over 28,700 visitors throughout the season

Our vendors generated approx. \$574,000 in sales during the 2022 season



The Market supported over 64 farmers, prepared food vendors and artisans

Every week, the Market has around 5 to 6 prepared food vendors selling ready-to-eat food such as Filipino-fusion meals to Nepalese dumplings and gluten-free waffles.



Enough Was Enough

Prior to 2016, when Withrow Market launched its first zero waste efforts, staff and volunteers realized that the amount of disposable coffee cups and packaging being produced was unsustainable. Based on coffee sales alone, the market served approximately **1,690 single use coffee cups** in 2016 over 20 market days. Withrow Market switched to compostable coffee cups to reduce its footprint, but it wasn't a perfect solution. "Compostable" cups still end up in landfill even if they are placed in the green bin program because they are not compatible with Toronto's anaerobic digestion composting technology.

Quick calculations showed that the market was generating over 10,000 single use coffee cups, takeout containers, drink cups, and cutlery each season. Enough was enough. We wanted to do better.

We needed to do better.

Our Journey To Waste Reduction

2017

- Pilot of reusable coffee mugs at the Market's coffee booth starts

2018

- Offer of reusable coffee mugs continues
- Pilot of dishware for food eaten at the Market starts
- Collecting data starts

2019

- Disposable coffee cups are phased out and only reusables are available.
- Reusable dishware pilot becomes permanent
- Launch of Zero Waste Station
- New Zero Waste Ambassador volunteers

2020

- All reusable programs are put on hold due to COVID-19

2021

- Reusable programs still on hold due to COVID-19
- Introduction of reusable take-out containers from Suppli
- Introduction of CASE Reuse collection program for take-out containers

2022

- Introduction of reusable dishware program with Muuse
- CASE Reuse collection continues in partnership with Eastview Community Centre

Bring Your Own

Withrow Market has always supported customers to "bring your own" (BYO) containers and mugs, but it needed to think about how it could take these decision points upstream to alleviate consumer burden and make reusables more accessible.



2017 - Reusable Mug Pilot

In 2017, after conducting a simple waste audit, Withrow Market volunteers decided to offer ceramic mugs instead of using disposable coffee cups. The audit revealed that a large percentage of the disposable coffee cups served at the market ended up in the on-site garbage, which also indicated that many customers enjoyed their coffee at the market rather than taking the coffee away.

The reusable mug pilot was warmly embraced by many customers, with the market receiving positive feedback.



2018 - Dishware Program Pilot

With the help of an enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and dedicated volunteer, the reusable mug pilot at Withrow Market expanded to to the zero waste pilot, which included cutlery, plates and bowls for the other prepared food vendors.

The dishware collection was all sourced second hand from thrift stores and in-kind donations, furthering our commitment to the circular economy.

The pilot was a huge success! Customers loved being able to easily access low waste options for dining at the market and vendors were happy to reduce costs by not using disposables.

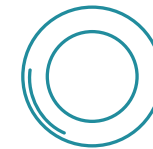
After piloting for 15 markets in 2018, the dishware was used over 1,900 times, preventing that many single-use items from going into the landfill.



**1,929 items
saved from
landfill**



294 cups



508 plates and
246 bowls



880 pieces
of cutlery



2019 - Zero Waste Initiative Formalizes

In 2019, Withrow Park Farmers' Market officially committed to becoming a low waste farmers market by creating a formal Zero Waste Policy with the long-term goal of reducing and eliminating waste generated at Withrow Market rather than simply diverting it. The policy included Zero Waste Guidelines for vendors to follow.

With this zero waste program, Withrow Market aims to:

- Eliminate waste: by offering reusable items such as plates and cutlery
- Reduce waste: by keeping recyclable materials and discarded food scraps out of landfills
- 'Close the loop': by promoting the use of post-consumer recycled products
- Educate: by encouraging shoppers and market sellers to reduce, reuse, and recycle both at the market and beyond



2019 - Reusable Dishware Program

With the reusable dishware implemented as a permanent program in 2019, Withrow Market developed a Zero Waste Ambassador volunteer role. The dishware program operated smoothly each week due to the phenomenal hard work and dedication of these individuals. Thanks to the Zero Waste Ambassadors a booth dubbed the “Zero Waste Station” was created.

Withrow Market surpassed its 2018 impact with a total of 10,000 single-use items being diverted from becoming waste.

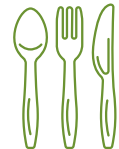
**10,000 items
saved from
landfill**



4,445 cups



2,045 plates
and bowls



3,510 pieces
of cutlery

“

It's great initiative and encourages people to be more aware of their consumption and simple ways they can reuse/reduce in their own lives.

- Customer, 2019 survey

“

Great work! Keep it up! You are a model market for the whole city.

- Customer, 2019 survey

“

Help reduce waste and our operating cost - use reusable dishware. Every effort counts!

- Gemaro Bakery, 2022

“

Inspiring. On point. Fantastic. Love it! You are affecting change exponentially!

- Customer, 2019 survey

“

Hey #Toronto, have you checked out the waste reduction initiatives at Withrow Market? We wish all markets become as low waste as Withrow has so far!

- Zero Waste Hub via Twitter, 2022

2020 to 2021 - Pandemic Pivot

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, food was not allowed to be consumed within the farmers market. Withrow Market introduces reusable takeout containers with Suppli and a collection site for plastic takeout containers in partnership with CASE Reuse in 2021.

Suppli

Three prepared food vendors offered stainless-steel takeout containers from Suppli. Customers would register with Suppli, request the containers from the vendors, and take them home to enjoy their market meals without any waste! Once finished customers just had to rinse the containers and return them to a local drop-off location.

IMPACT

65 orders which equaled approx 110 disposable takeout containers saved from landfill!



2020 to 2021 - Pandemic Pivot

CASE Reuse

The pandemic caused a huge increase in single-use items being used by takeout. To make matters worse, black plastic is not recyclable in Toronto. Withrow Market partnered with CASE Reuse so customers could donate their clean plastic takeout containers with matching lids. CASE Reuse collects the containers, sorts, sanitizes, and distributes back to restaurants for reuse.

IMPACT

40 large bags of plastic takeout containers collected. Approx. 400kg of plastic saved to be recirculated!



2022

This season we partnered with Dream Zero / Muuse to offer reusable takeout containers and insulated coffee mugs to help market patrons access more low waste options. To borrow these items for free, patrons simply had to download an app on their phone and then scan the QR code on the reusable item.

We also re-introduced reusable plates and cutlery for patrons that were staying to eat their market meals in the park. All of the dishwashing was conducted by Dream Zero / Muuse.



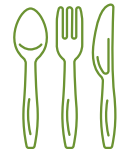
**3,235 items
saved from
landfill**



797 Muuse cups
871 BYO cups



677 plates



725 pieces
of cutlery



Repair, Rehome and More...

As part of the zero waste commitment, Withrow Market proudly committed to being environmentally friendly in these other meaningful ways:

- Were the first farmers' market in Toronto to create a "Zero Waste Guideline" for vendors. Asking vendors to use less packaging and to provide compostable or biodegradable packaging when possible
- Launched a program to promote reusable dishware and takeout containers to eliminate the generation of waste at the market
- Gave preference to local artisans that produce products that use natural, upcycled, eco-friendly, and sustainable materials, including packaging
- Supported the repair and swap movement by hosting repair workshops and swap events. Including bike, jewellery and clothing repairs and kitchen items, clothing, kids stuff and cookbook swaps
- Launched "Need a bag - Take a bag - Leave a bag" box to reduce the use of plastic bags
- Hosted winter clothing drives, benefiting newcomers to Canada
- Collected end-of life batteries and pens/markers for proper recycling
- Gave free space to community groups whose messages and activities are complementary to those of the Market, and raise awareness about or work on improving environmental, health or social issues in the community



Acknowledgements

All our efforts and impacts would not have been possible without the support of so many people!

A great big thank you to...

Our volunteers for developing and helping the programs and initiatives run smoothly. Particularly, Katrina McGuire, for spearheading the reusable dishware program in 2018.

Our former market manager, Chantal Stepa, for fostering and building these programs and initiatives under her management.

Our board of directors for pledging to become a low-waste market at an organizational level - particularly, Janet Robins, for her enthusiasm and openness to share knowledge about best practices.

Our vendors for participating in the reusable dishware programs and making a concerted effort to reduce waste in their business practices.

Our community members and market patrons for supporting the initiatives by choosing reusables and participating in our events and activities.

