



environmental services association



Feedback on the quality of feedstocks for compost and AD facilities Summary results of an industry survey

A survey carried out in autumn 2016 has provided useful insight into the impacts of feedstock quality on compost and AD operators in the UK.

The survey was completed by 15 AD operators, 15 composters and 5 respondents operating both compost and AD sites.

This summary of the survey results can help:

- organic waste processors view how their peers are affected by these issues in comparison with their own businesses
- waste providers view how their own behaviour may impact other businesses and the environment
- help industry bodies target action to deliver a sustainable organic waste processing industry

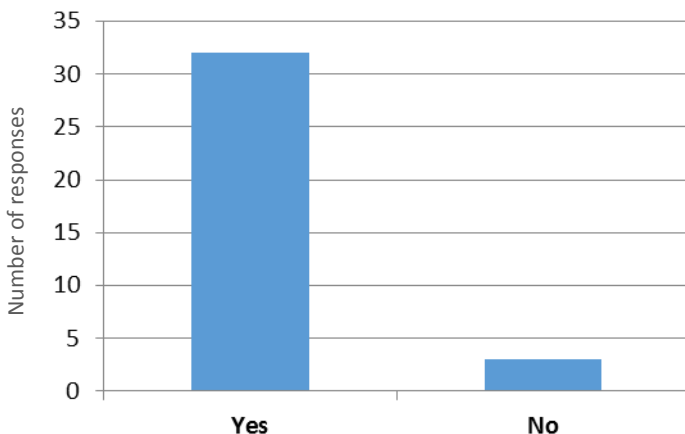
The survey supports continuous improvement in the quality of compost and digestate products and was delivered collaboratively by the organisations noted above, with the kind support of their stakeholders.

The summary of a related survey into the quality of compost and digestate products is also available.

Is feedstock contamination important?

Both AD and compost operators clearly identified feedstock contamination as a significant issue affecting their businesses.

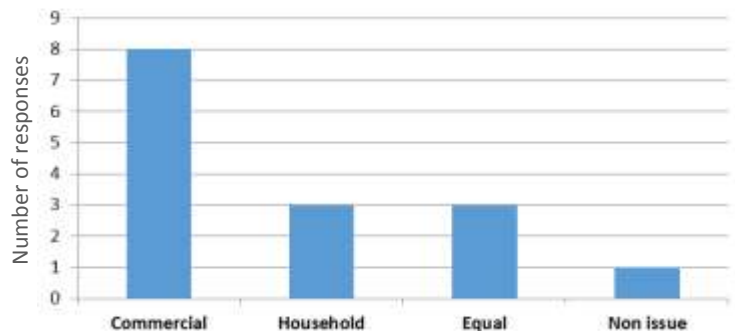
Is feedstock contamination an important issue for your business (all respondents)



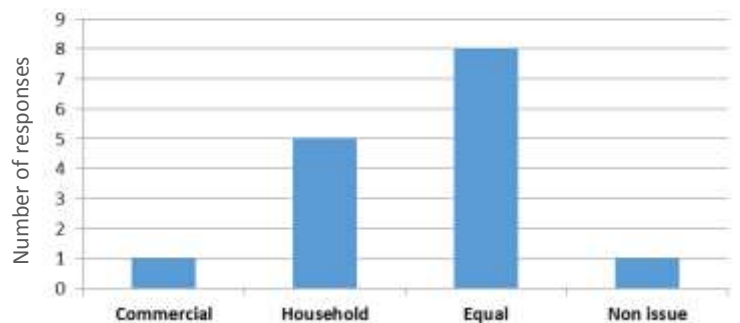
The source of feedstock contamination varied. AD operators more clearly identified commercial food waste as the most significant source of contaminants, although some operators found that household food waste was at least an equally important source of contaminants.

Compost operators most commonly identified both household and commercial waste as equal sources of contaminants, but a notable number of operators identified household food waste as the primary source of contaminants. This may reflect the type of feedstocks that composters typically process.

AD - Is feedstock contamination more significant for household or commercial waste?



Compost - Is feedstock contamination more significant for household or commercial waste?

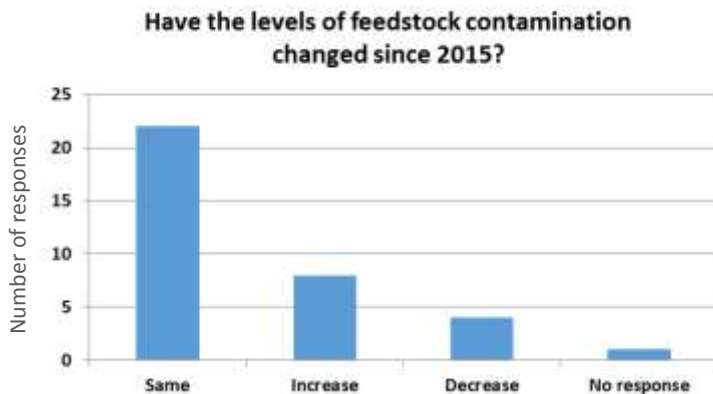


Does feedstock contamination affect end products?

Respondents were asked to rate the impact that feedstock contamination had on the quality of their compost or digestate products. Where a response of 1 corresponded with a low impact and 10 a high impact, the average score was 7.5 and the most frequent answer was 10 (across all respondents). Responses were similar for both digestate and compost.

Are contamination levels changing?

Both compost and AD operators reported that levels of feedstock contamination were mostly static, with some reporting an increase and a few reporting a decrease. This suggests that the benefits of action taken under the industry initiative, the *Food Waste Recycling Action Plan*, are yet to have been felt.



Why do you think this is?

The survey included a free-text box for respondents to explain why they thought contamination rates had, or had not changed. Comments highlighting common themes or useful insight are included below. Comments included do not distinguish between AD and compost as common themes were identified by both.

Reasons for improvements in quality:

- *"[The]... local authority refusal to pick-up cross-contaminated bins, put this into practice and 6 months later quite a difference."*
- *"We have introduced lower acceptable limits for visible contamination."*
- *"Our feedstock sources have changed from household, commercial and recycling centre waste to just commercial and recycling centre waste. Since the change, the contamination levels have dropped significantly."*

Reasons for no change, or deteriorating quality:

- *"No driver for waste producers to change..."*
- *"Lack of commitment on the part of management to improve segregation of waste before delivery to sites."*
- *"Lack of feedback to feedstock producers on the need to control their waste more stringently and train staff on the right and wrong things to do."*
- *"Pressure from suppliers on composting sites not to reject / complain about contamination in feedstock. Falling gate fees and pressure to win waste adds to this problem."*
- *"Complacency/misunderstanding from householders, budgets not available to councils to tackle contamination through education/ reward programmes."*
- *"Council cut backs reducing time effort allocated to improving feedstock quality."*
- *"Reduction in local authority municipal collection changing from weekly to fortnightly."*
- *"Cost of legal and legitimate disposal of some waste streams too high and temptation to contaminate other waste streams too great as a result."*

Methodology

To generate these results, an online survey using Survey Monkey was carried out through autumn 2016. The question set and full results are annexed to this summary.

There were 35 respondents, which was considered a good response. Thanks are due to colleagues and stakeholders of the above named organisations for promoting the survey.

No statistical analysis has been carried out on the results, and readers should use their own judgement to decide whether the results are representative.

The survey asked respondents for their opinion; there was no ability to verify how accurate this was.