



Spotlight



Reusable pizza box pilot

March 2024



As part of the Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP), Broadford & Strath Community Company (BSCC), set out to trial reusable pizza boxes on the island to reduce waste, lower packaging expenses, and promote sustainability within the local community.

Approach

Deposit return scheme and associated challenges

Purchased in bulk, the pizza boxes were initially offered to local businesses with the idea that they could be provided to customers on a deposit return basis: customers would pay a deposit on the reusable box for their pizza, which would incentivise them to return it to the business to be reused. However, this raised a number of logistical and operational challenges:

- **Lack of storage space:** Many businesses found it difficult to accommodate the reusable pizza boxes due to limited storage space, which was required for both clean and used items.
- **Cleaning facilities:** The responsibility for washing and maintaining the boxes was also a significant concern. Businesses without the necessary washing facilities were hesitant to adopt the scheme, fearing it would add extra operational costs and labour.
- **Deposit and return system:** Concerns about the added work of tracking deposits, handling refunds, and ensuring boxes were returned in a timely manner was another reason businesses shied away from participation.
- **Resistance to Change:** Many local pizza restaurants were used to the simplicity of single-use disposable boxes, and the thought of switching to a more complex, reusable system seemed daunting. The introduction of reusable boxes required not only operational adjustments but also a cultural shift toward more sustainable practices.

A shift in strategy: consumer-led

To resolve these issues, BSCC decided to offer the pizza boxes to individuals to help local households and tourists reduce their single-use items and packaging. Much like the reusable coffee cup trend, the strategy promoted the idea of individuals taking reusable pizza boxes home, offering them the chance to participate in sustainable practices without relying on businesses to manage the logistics.

Success stories

A remote pizza business with high seasonal foot traffic was able to successfully implement the reusable pizza boxes, reducing the around 400 single-use boxes normally used over the season.

This was a business that had ample storage space and in-house washing facilities for the boxes. In addition, the business had many customers, making the use of reusable boxes practical.

The business was able to reduce its dependency on disposable packaging, saving money and contributing to a more sustainable operation.



A local Forest School, a community-focused educational institution, embraced the use of reusable pizza boxes. The children, who had built their own pizza oven, enjoyed using the boxes as part of their outdoor learning activities. The forest school initiative fostered environmental awareness among young learners and helped instill sustainable practices in the next generation. The boxes also found a secondary use beyond restaurants, demonstrating their versatility and value in educational contexts.

Finally, offering the reusable pizza boxes for **individual consumers** to use, similar to a reusable cup, saw good uptake and was also a significant opportunity for community engagement. Many were excited about the initiative and a new way to reduce waste, particularly among those who were already environmentally aware.

Conclusion

While the original plan to introduce reusable pizza boxes to local businesses faced several challenges, the shift to engaging individuals and certain businesses with appropriate infrastructure resulted in success. The experience highlighted the importance of flexibility in strategy and demonstrated that sustainable practices can thrive when the right conditions are met.

Key takeaways:

- Successful adoption: Remote businesses with the right infrastructure, such as storage space and washing facilities, can benefit from reusable pizza boxes.
- Community engagement: Educational institutions like forest schools can serve as ideal platforms for promoting sustainability.
- Consumer Empowerment: Individuals are eager to adopt eco-friendly alternatives when given the opportunity.



What next

By continuing to refine the approach and build on the successes already achieved, the reusable pizza box initiative can expand its impact and contribute meaningfully to local sustainability efforts.



Scaling the initiative:

- Focus on businesses with high foot traffic and appropriate infrastructure.
- Expand efforts to include more schools and community groups that could benefit from the initiative.

Wider consumer engagement:

- Continue promoting reusable pizza boxes to individual customers.
- Explore partnerships with local businesses to offer incentives or discounts for those who use reusable boxes.

Educational and community outreach:

- Organise workshops and outreach programs to further educate the community about the environmental benefits of using reusable products.

Learn more: <https://www.broadfordandstrath.org/>

The Highland Community Waste Partnership (2022-2025)

Funded by The National Lottery Climate Action Fund, and coordinated by Keep Scotland Beautiful, the Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP) brought together eight community groups in the Highlands to reduce waste and promote more sustainable consumption.

Learn more here: www.keeptscotlandbeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste/