

## CASE STUDY

# Reciclo Organicos Program in Chile

Promoting behavioral change toward  
a sustainable management of organic  
waste



TOOL TYPE:  
BEHAVIORAL  
CHANGE  
CAMPAIGNS



## CASE: CHILE

## Introduction:

In Chile, organic waste constitutes a significant proportion of the total Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) generated each year, accounting for approximately 58% by weight. This is a considerably higher percentage compared to other fractions, such as packaging materials like plastic, cardboard, glass, and cans. Despite the high proportion of organic waste, the rate of recovery for this type of waste is incredibly low, with less than 1% being recovered for valorization.<sup>1</sup> This means that most organic waste ends up in final disposal sites. To address this issue, the

government, private sector, and individuals started working together to develop effective waste management strategies, including composting and recycling initiatives. Citizen involvement is crucial to the success of these strategies, as they play a key role in the proper separation of organic waste at the source and the operation of valorization solutions. However, this requires a significant change in behavior, as well as becoming aware of their responsibility on their own waste generation patterns.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Environment, 2021

In February 1997, Chile and Canada signed a Free Trade Agreement that included two parallel agreements, the Labor Cooperation Agreement and the Environmental Cooperation Agreement. In the years following, international agreements like the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) held in Paris in 2015, prompted several countries to make commitments to reduce their Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, given their impact on climate change. In light of this, Canada decided to invest in actions to decrease GHG emissions in Chile through the Environmental Cooperation Agreement<sup>2</sup>. The collaboration between Chile and Canada culminated in the establishment of the Organic Recycling Program (Reciclo Orgánicos). This initiative targeted both the public and private sectors in different communities throughout the country and aimed to combat GHG emissions in the waste sector by means of the implementation of composting plants, anaerobic digesters and the capture and use of landfill gas. The program was initiated by the Chilean Ministry of the Environment and the Canadian Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and was executed by Arcadis and ImplementaSur.



<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Environment, 2022

## Objectives

The Organic Recycling Program aimed to accelerate the implementation of various types of projects in Chile by providing technical and financial support to municipalities and private companies. To achieve this goal **one of the main pillars of Organic Recycling was community engagement**. This pillar strived to raise awareness among the community, authorities, and private sector about the impact of GHG emissions caused by the disposal of organic matter in landfills. Its four main lines of action were:



### Involvement:

Encouraging citizen participation and enabling the involvement of all actors through face-to-face and virtual activities to promote links with the community and reduce the disposal of organic waste in landfills.



### Education:

Socio-environmental education is key to encourage citizens to incorporate organic waste management habits into their daily lives. Therefore, one of the program's goals was to sensitize municipalities and the community in general using materials aimed to promote tangible actions (e.g. household composting or vermicomposting).



### Communication:

The objective was to increase public awareness on the benefits of recycling organic waste and its relationship with climate change.





## The process

To enhance community engagement, participation, and raising awareness, the program developed activities to work on its three work streams.

### Activities of involvement

Encouraging citizen participation and promoting collaboration among stakeholders was a fundamental aspect of the Reciclo Orgánicos Program. To achieve this, the program organized various face-to-face and virtual events, such as workshops on food waste and organic waste management, visits to anaerobic digestion plants, seminars, and the distribution of compost bins. The objective of these activities was to engage with the community and raise awareness about the importance of reducing the disposal of organic waste in landfills. In particular it is important to highlight that the **visits to waste management facilities highly motivated the participants to actively collaborate with separation at source.** Being able to see what happens to the waste they separate at home was key in raising awareness and enabling them to see the broader effect that their actions were producing.



The delivery of compost bins was carried out within the collaboration framework of the Reciclo Orgánicos Program with the Ministry of the Environment in the process of technical evaluation and public consultation of the National Organic Waste Strategy (ENRO), later becoming one of the allies for the implementation of the ENRO, technically and financially supporting the Home Composting and Vermicomposting Plan. The purpose was to promote the implementation of both techniques at the household level, in addition to leaving capacities installed in the municipalities of Coquimbo, Los Andes, Peñalolén, Chillán, Pucón and Gorbea. In each case, **municipal staff were trained so that they in turn could train their neighbors while delivering the composting or vermicomposting equipment.**





The Organic Recycle Program ended in 2022 and was transferred to the Ministry of the Environment. Since then, follow-up has been carried out directly by the municipalities, such as in Concepción. Concepción has promoted the home composting program since 2016. In this case, the **follow-up to the participants of the home composting program is done through phone calls, contact** via WhatsApp and emails. In addition, face-to-face visits are carried out in which the correct use of the equipment is evaluated, and the parameters of humidity, temperature and pH are controlled. Regarding the follow-ups carried out and according to findings from 2016, the most common problems identified were excess moisture in decomposing organic matter and the presence of flies<sup>3</sup>. During these visits recommendations are given to improve the operation of the composting equipment.

### Activities of education

Socio-environmental education plays a vital role in encouraging citizens to adopt organic waste management practices in their homes. To achieve this, they aim to raise awareness among municipalities and the

general community through the distribution of educational materials. These **materials are designed to encourage tangible actions such as household composting and vermicomposting, and are tailored to specific audiences.**

Examples of educational materials developed for citizens included composting and vermicomposting guides, recycling tips, emission reduction calculators for households and for entrepreneurs, learn by playing options (including a mini game book, a memory game, mandala and crossword puzzles) and a recipe book among other materials. Materials intended for municipalities included composting manuals, communication toolkits with signs and posters, and a municipal composting plant implementation diagram. There were also composting manuals specifically designed for educational establishments such as schools.



<sup>3</sup> Aste von Bennewitz, 2022.





## Activities of communication

For the communication work stream, the program employed several strategies. Between 2018 and 2022, the program periodically disseminated press releases, informative bulletins, publications on social networks, videos on YouTube, and news on the program's own website including:



### Media Presence:

The "Reciclo Orgánicos" Program developed 23 press releases, 14 of which were accompanied by infographics, and received nearly 180 appearances in various recognized media outlets such as El Mercurio and La Tercera national newspapers, LUN, El Mostrador, and El Desconcierto, as well as the national television channel TVN and Radio Bío-Bío, among others.



### Newsletters:

The program also produced 27 digital newsletters, targeted to an audience segmented according to their database, featuring news about the program's development and climate change-related issues.



### YouTube:

The Reciclo Orgánicos YouTube channel also shared 33 educational videos, reaching over 5,000 views as of 2023.



### Social Networks:

Since its launch in May 2018, the @reciclorganicos social networks was active on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#), with a communication strategy focused on daily publications of categorized content, achieving prominent and consistent positioning throughout the program's duration. As of March 2022, nearly 1,000 posts had been published, with an average reach of 7 to 15 thousand views per publication, and over 68 thousand followers.



### News:

The program's website ([www.reciclorganicos.com](http://www.reciclorganicos.com)) published monthly news related to project progress and climate change and organic waste-related issues.



## Results

The results of the community involvement in this initiative have been significant in promoting proper management of organic waste and reducing its environmental impact. The high number of participants in citizen workshops, webinars, and activities with municipalities, as well as the delivery of organic waste recovery equipment to households, **demonstrate the success of the initiative in engaging citizens and raising awareness** about the importance of organic waste management. An example is that some municipalities had such a high demand of household composting equipment that waiting lists had to be generated because the supply of equipment could not keep up with the high demand of the community members. The **educational materials produced and the active social media presence have also contributed to increasing understanding** among citizens about the impact of their actions on the environment and the role they can play in mitigating climate change.

In terms of community involvement, at the conclusion of the execution period of

this initiative, more citizens have gained a greater understanding that proper management of organic waste is key to reducing the environmental impact of current practices and directly contributes to mitigating climate change. Among the main outcomes of the citizen engagement pillar are:

- ✓ Over 50 documents produced as educational material.
- ✓ 250 participants in citizen workshops on organics recycling.
- ✓ 6 webinars
- ✓ 40 activities with municipalities.
- ✓ Delivery of 1,905 organic waste recovery equipment at the household level.
- ✓ Over 25 newsletters, more than 1,000 post on social media and more than 68,000 followers on Instagram.





## Lessons learned and future challenges

Citizenship engagement in organic waste management is an essential component of sustainable waste management practices. In recent years, awareness-raising campaigns and educational initiatives have helped to encourage citizens to adopt alternative waste management options. However, challenges still remain in ensuring that citizens fully engage in organic waste management practices. Learning from past experiences and future challenges is crucial to ensure that effective strategies are in place to achieve sustainable waste management goals.

- **Lack of knowledge on the link between organic waste and climate change:** Although there is knowledge of the environmental benefits of recycling inorganic waste and preventing waste generation, it has been identified that the relationship between organic waste disposal and climate change is not well-known. For this reason, it is necessary to continue awareness-raising campaigns on methane emissions from the anaerobic decomposition of organic waste, how these influence climate change, and how this, in turn, damages ecosystems. Disseminating this knowledge will encourage citizens to adopt alternative disposal measures to landfills.



- **A key role of social organizations:** Reaching out to citizens through local social organizations is more effective than other approaches. For instance, organizing workshops not only with the municipality but also collaborating with neighborhood councils is a good strategy. Another example was the partnership with Fundación Basura for the launch of the Online Course: “Scales of Organic Recycling.” Additionally, it was important to develop infographics for social organizations and municipalities to use and adapt in the future. This is because social organizations often do not have the resources to develop such communication tools.
- **The relevance of Educational Institutions:** It was found that encouraging organic recycling in educational institutions has a direct effect on students’ families. This is because students learn the process of organic recycling and then seek to replicate it at home. In this regard, the program collaborated with the Ministry of Education in the preparation of educational material for schools.
- **Collaborative Approach to Waste Management:** In the ecosystem of actors that need to collaborate to improve waste management, an increasing number of





private companies are developing waste management projects. It is useful that the management and communication of such projects does not only come from the private sector, as this can generate some resistance in local communities. In this sense, it is recommended to involve third parties such as the municipality and social organizations to help explain the social and environmental benefits of each project and dispel myths that may arise in the community.

- **The importance of Political Support:** In order to accelerate the development of organic recycling projects, it is important to highlight the social and environmental benefits of the projects to the local authorities to obtain their support. It is not enough to work with municipal technicians alone, as political support from the authorities, as well as the support of the local community, will be needed to get the projects off the ground in the short term.



## References

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