

Case Study - Salamanca Market

A large-scale event taking steps towards becoming plastic free

Salamanca Market is a bustling weekly event in the heart of Hobart. Famous throughout Australia for its local produce and artisanal products, the market is an important part of Tasmania's identity.

Working closely with stallholders to switch to compostable food packaging, Salamanca Market is committed to demonstrating their passion for sustainability. In addition to their food packaging initiatives, they have also put in place waste management practices that have helped to reduce the market's environmental impact.

Salamanca Market's Brand Marketing Specialist Trish Stagg and Senior Advisor Robert Matson talk about how they have collaborated with the market's stallholders to move towards a plastic-free future.



Who is Salamanca Market?

Trish: "We are a market that pops up in Salamanca on a Saturday. We've got 300 stalls, which is absolutely massive – we're the biggest tourist attraction in Tasmania. We get a lot of interstate visitation, and a lot of people come to Hobart just for the market."

We pride ourselves on Tasmanian-made products and produce. We've got a real focus on supporting local small businesses, and have made a big effort over the last decade to ensure everything sold at the event is made and grown right here in Tasmania."

Compostable food packaging at Salamanca Market

What is Salamanca Market's sustainability ethos?

Robert: “Salamanca Market has always had community at its heart. The sustainable nature of the market has always been there. Our stallholders have come up with a lot of creative ways to save plastic and reuse resources.

Salamanca Market is run by the City of Hobart. We try to align with the City of Hobart’s sustainability targets, they are key drivers for us. Hobart has a goal of zero waste to landfill by 2030. We have tried to make the market into a leader in sustainability for the city.”

Trish: “When a new stallholder joins us there is an application process, and one of our criteria is sustainability. So we specifically ask them “what are you doing in your business that ticks all these boxes.” We have stallholders for example that might be making food or spirits for the market. They are then using the waste to make another product, or composting it in their gardens. It’s really positive as to just how sustainable some of these small businesses are becoming.”

Robert: “Our stallholders are a really sustainable group of businesses.”

What was the first plastic-free initiative that Salamanca Market put in place?

Trish: “In 2018 we did a big push to get compostable packaging into the market and switch out single-use plastics. We held a lot of opportunities for stallholders to come and touch and see the various compostable food packaging options available, and we held workshops with suppliers.”

Robert: “We also had an interim program where we collected stallholder’s plastic bags and swapped them out for paper bags. We timed this to line up with Plastic Free July – a great opportunity for us to make the transition to compostables.”

Trish: “The plastic bags that we collected and swapped out were sent to Replas and turned into park benches. There’s two park benches down on Salamanca lawns that are made from these plastic bags. The back of the chairs have a lovely design of the market; that was a real statement for us, we were really proud of that. Not only did we swap out the bags, but we did something useful with them.”

What other initiatives have you put in place to reduce single-use plastic waste?

Trish: “We have done an incredible amount of work on waste signage. We’ve had to tweak it over and over again; we’ve had writing, pictures, and one display case that actually shows people what to put in each bin. People can be confused about coffee cups in particular, ours can go in FOGO because they are compostable, but because it’s different in different areas, it can be confusing for people.”

Robert: “We have three different waste streams at Salamanca Market. We have cardboard recycling, general waste, and FOGO. We actually employ our own drivers to drive the trucks – they go to the tip and physically drop it all off at different places.

We’ve done a couple of waste audits where the contents of the trucks were tipped onto a tarpaulin and the auditors sort through it all. They identified how much waste there was in each stream and how much contamination there was.

We also have a waste education trailer now too. People often take photos of it, so from an educational perspective it is good, people get very excited when they see it.”

Why did Salamanca Market decide to reduce single-use plastics?

Trish: “We genuinely thought it was a really, really good thing to do. We could see that there were benefits to being the first one to make the switch to compostables, and showcasing the fact that we were doing good things in the community. And now in 2024 it’s almost normal that most tourist attractions have to have environmental credentials, whereas back then it just felt like the right thing to do.”



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What steps did you take?

Robert: “We did a bit of research into finding out what the capabilities for processing compostable waste were. We were already running waste trucks to the market, and we knew that the city had split stream trucks that could take two waste sources.

Then we started talking to stallholders about it and preparing them for what was coming. We let them know that from July 1, this is what we’re doing. This happened over a period of about 3 months.”

Trish: “We did a lot of legwork with food packaging suppliers to make sure that there was an alternative for every single piece of plastic food packaging. We gave that information to our stallholders as a package. It showed what it looked like, what it costs, and who they should talk to. We tried to make it as easy as possible.”

Robert: “We didn’t want to go around with a big stick, we wanted to encourage stallholders to use up their old stock and head towards compostables. I think now, it’s just become second nature. The Hobart City Council single-use plastic by-law helped too.”

Trish: “That came into effect in 2021 and was really influential, although the market was already ahead of that.”

Robert: “We also had a member of the stallholder association who was a champion for us when it came to making the switch to compostables. They went around and spoke to all the stallholders about how easy it is. Adopting a champion is great; we were very lucky to have them.”

What were some of the challenges Salamanca Market faced when making the switch away from single-use plastic food packaging?

Robert: “There were some concerns about the cost of compostables. But now it’s become more mainstream, the costs have come down and it’s the standard rather than the exception. People’s expectations have changed a fair bit too, and they aren’t happy to accept a coffee in a styrofoam cup.”

Trish: “We’re doing some good things within the market to make it more environmentally friendly. However, there are still some challenges with long life foods, and complications with keeping some packaged foods in beautiful condition. So, we haven’t nailed that yet.”

Robert: “Packaging is improving all the time. At the beginning we had issues with paper bags and, when they get wet, the bottoms falling out. Now that the technology has improved, that’s not an issue anymore. We also sell jute bags, which people reuse over and over. They are an item that people like to take home with them.”

What are some of the positives that Salamanca Market found when switching away from single-use plastics?

Trish: “A lot of our stallholders are very creative, and after we switched away from plastic bags, many of them designed their own branded reusable bags to sell. It meant that it wasn’t just brown paper bags, people could also purchase a reusable bag. And it was another income stream for the stallholders.””

“With our compostable food packaging, there is also the beautiful compost that we get at the end of it. I’ve been out to the composting site and have stood in the windrows where our compost goes and it’s stinky, but beautiful. By the end of it, it’s just beautiful soil that goes around all our city parks and gardens. It gives back to the community.”

Robert: “Being a part of the tourism industry you can get accreditations through the Tasmanian Tourism Industry Council, and we have a sustainability one with them now. Little things like that give you something you can add to your credentials. It gives people faith that you’re operating as well as you can.”

Trish: I think tourists, nowadays, expect more from events. They don’t value places that aren’t doing a good job anymore. So it really helps that we are doing as much as we can, people value it and respond well to it. It’s really important that we continue to improve and make changes where we can.”

What advice would you give to other markets or events who are thinking of going plastic free?

Trish: “Make it as easy as possible for everybody. Provide easy to understand information, it goes beyond just giving stallholders a manual. Consult, consult, consult. Work with people.”

Robert: “We were on the ground helping stallholders. Be flexible, it’s more about changing long term behaviours.”

Trish: “Also work with suppliers. There’s no point working incredibly hard with stallholders if they can’t source compostables. We all need to be on the same page to find solutions. We have 300 stallholders, so there’s a lot of different products being used, and whilst cost is important, it’s also particular things that people need.”

What’s next for Salamanca Market?

Trish: “We really want to do a promotion on our FOGO and green waste — where it goes and how it’s turned into compost for the city’s parks and gardens. It’s a good waste story.

Another thing that is going on is that the City has installed water bubblers along the waterfront. Coming into summer, when people are hot and thirsty, we can encourage people to buy a reusable water bottle and fill it up. It’s a nice, easy, simple solution.

There’s a lot of communication we can still do on the waste front, and it’s always going to be a case of getting our bins labelled more effectively.”