

## Case Study - Wattlebanks Cafe and Providore Reusable Milk Kegs

Wattlebanks Cafe and Providore, nestled in the heart of Richmond and Orford, is a popular spot for locals and visitors alike. Beyond serving exceptional coffee and delicious bites, Wattlebanks has taken significant strides to minimise their environmental impact.

Recognising the growing need for sustainable waste management, the team at Wattlebanks have implemented innovative measures to reduce single-use plastic foodware. Among their most notable initiatives is the adoption of reusable milk kegs.

We sat down with Katrina Williams (Co-owner) and Rebecca Fuller (Manager) to find out how these efforts have not only strengthened Wattlebanks commitment to fostering a greener community, but contributed to creating a more sustainable Tasmania.

### ***Who is Wattlebanks?***

***Katrina:*** “Wattlebanks is a business that’s owned by myself and my brother, Rod. We started as Wattlebanks Catering, with two food vans. We cater for weddings, functions and events.

In 2019 we found out about a property becoming available in Richmond. We weren’t planning to open a cafe at the time, but it was a great setting for us; we could utilise the kitchen for function prep and then run a cafe in the heart of Richmond. So we opened up the cafe in May 2019.

When Covid hit in March 2020, it had a big impact on us. We changed the business and added our cafe and providore. Not long after this we found out about a property at Orford and we opened up Wattlebanks Coastal Cafe. So the business now encompasses two cafes, the catering business and we also have a new service called

Wattlebanks at Home, providing ready-made quality meals, freshly made locally, for people with home-care needs.”

***Tell us about your sustainable initiatives.***

***Katrina:*** “It was really important when we first started Wattlebanks that we weren’t using too many single-use plastics, certainly not items like straws, and so straight off the bat we were using biodegradable packaging that were available for our takeaway offerings.

For our functions, we streamline packaging, and where we can use things that can be washed-up and reused, we look to do that. When we’re working at function venues, we utilise the reusable crockery they have there.

Within our cafe operations recycling was really important for us. The [Udder Way](#) reusable milk keg system came in off the back of us not having a recycling service at our cafe in Orford. At Richmond it was the volume of plastic that we were producing that made us make the switch [to reusable milk kegs].”



The Udder Way reusable milk keg system in use

***Tell us about the reusable milk keg initiative with The Udder Way and Bream Creek Dairy.***

***Katrina:*** “We heard about The Udder Way milk keg system last year through social media. We reached out to The Udder Way who told us all about the system, and we then got to see it in use at a few other venues. We decided to partner with them and Bream Creek Dairy to switch to a milk keg system with fresh local milk.

We implemented it first at our Orford cafe, with a tap system for our coffees and for locals to purchase milk from us in reusable glass bottles. This helped to reduce our customer’s recycling waste, as well as ours, which is a big benefit in regional areas that aren’t serviced with a recycling waste stream.”

***What made you decide to try the reusable milk keg system?***

***Katrina:*** “I think it really does come down to the sheer volume of milk that we go through for coffees, particularly over summer time. So when we heard about The Udder Way, we decided it was something we should look into. Obviously there are the sustainability and environmental benefits, and from a business perspective there are also longer term financial benefits around rubbish removal. We see it as a future cost saving for our business.

The other aspect was to offer something for our locals as a service and value-add that we can help provide.”

***What were the challenges you faced, and how did you overcome them?***

***Katrina:*** “We didn’t face too many challenges. The system was installed for us and there was a lot of training provided. We did need to adjust to using 18L kegs and making sure we were doing our ordering correctly. Introducing the reusable bottle refill

system and getting the word out there to our clients came with some challenges, but we overcame those by promoting it on social media.”

**Rebecca:** “The milk kegs can be heavy, so there is an element of mindfulness required around safely lifting them the right way when they are being replaced. We’ve developed some strategies to make it safer for our staff. We now use a trolley to transport the kegs and we have a milk crate that we sit the keg onto and slide it onto the shelf.”

Another issue was related to temperature control with our fridges. Between our two sites at Richmond and Orford the fridges are very different, so there was a bit of tweaking required to the fridge settings to accommodate the larger kegs. The Udder Way sent us across a few videos, which was really helpful, and we got it all sorted.

We also got some advice from The Udder Way about questions around cleaning the system. We continually check-in with staff on how the system is going and make adjustments as needed.”



Customer refill milk station at Wattlebanks Café and Providore

***Were there any unexpected positive outcomes?***

**Katrina:** “We’ve had a business purchase milk from us because they wanted to be sustainable as well and have bottled milk for their clients. Their business is aligned with sustainable eco-tourism, so the flow-on is that they refer us to other people who are heading that way and might want to purchase milk in glass bottles.

People in our local community are quite happy about the fact that we are looking for ways to reduce our recycling waste. It has also put it on people’s radar that there are other initiatives that businesses could be trying to become more sustainable.”

***Has the milk keg system reduced your recycling waste volume?***

**Katrina:** “Yes, definitely.”

**Rebecca:** “As well as that, prior to the milk keg system, we used to go through so many plastic milk bottles that they used to accumulate quickly in our inside bins. This eliminates the plastic bottles, and is a much cleaner way of doing things.”

**Katrina:** “It reduces the need for outside recycling storage too. We used to have full sized wheelie bins full of milk bottles that wouldn’t get collected for a couple of days. It just keeps the place looking more clean and tidy.”

***What would you say to other cafes who are considering switching to a milk keg system?***

**Katrina:** “I absolutely recommend it. It’s been a worthwhile exercise for us, the system is very user-friendly. I encourage it and am happy to talk to other businesses if they want to have a conversation about our experience. They can also come down and have a look, that’s what we were able to do before we switched over.”

**Rebecca:** “That’s a really important point. Just come and have a look and ask questions. It can be something you’re not sure about and you may be asking “is this right for me?” Before we started with the milk keg system I visited a business in nearby Sorell and asked them a whole lot of questions and they totally sold it.”

***What’s next in plastic reduction for Wattlebanks?***

**Katrina:** “We’ve just found out there is a business that specialises in providing returnable containers for cafes to use. We’re looking into this for our ready-meals. For our larger functions, we’re looking at potentially providing reusable bowls for our small taster dishes, it depends on the location and whether there are wash-up options available. We also work with our suppliers on purchasing new and emerging products that are compostable.”