

Time to Talk Trash: The Top Barriers and Solutions for Composting in Faster-Food Restaurants

Michaela Fournier*, Program on the Environment, University of Washington

Site Supervisor: Maggie Brown, Cedar Grove

Faculty Advisor: Eli Wheat, Program on the Environment, University of Washington

 @Michaela490

Background

- Landfill waste generates leachates and methane, leading to air, water, and soil pollution.
- Countries are increasing faster-food consumption and creating higher amounts of landfill waste.
- In the United States, food generating businesses throw out approximately 24 million tons of food waste per year.
- Composting reduces the amount of landfill waste that emits harmful gases and produces a renewable resource.

Research Question

What are the common barriers affecting faster-food restaurants' willingness to compost, and what are the potential solutions to overcome these barriers?

Internship and Methods

- I interned with Cedar Grove as an outreach intern.
- Developed and administered surveys to faster-food restaurants within the King County region.
- Defined faster-food restaurants as locations as take-out style, fast-paced, limited seating, and low cost
- Conducted a literature review on current research of composting programs.



Figure 1. An exploration of the Cedar Grove composting facility to observe the final renewable product created through composting.

Results: Barriers



Employee turnover: causes need for consistent training for new employees

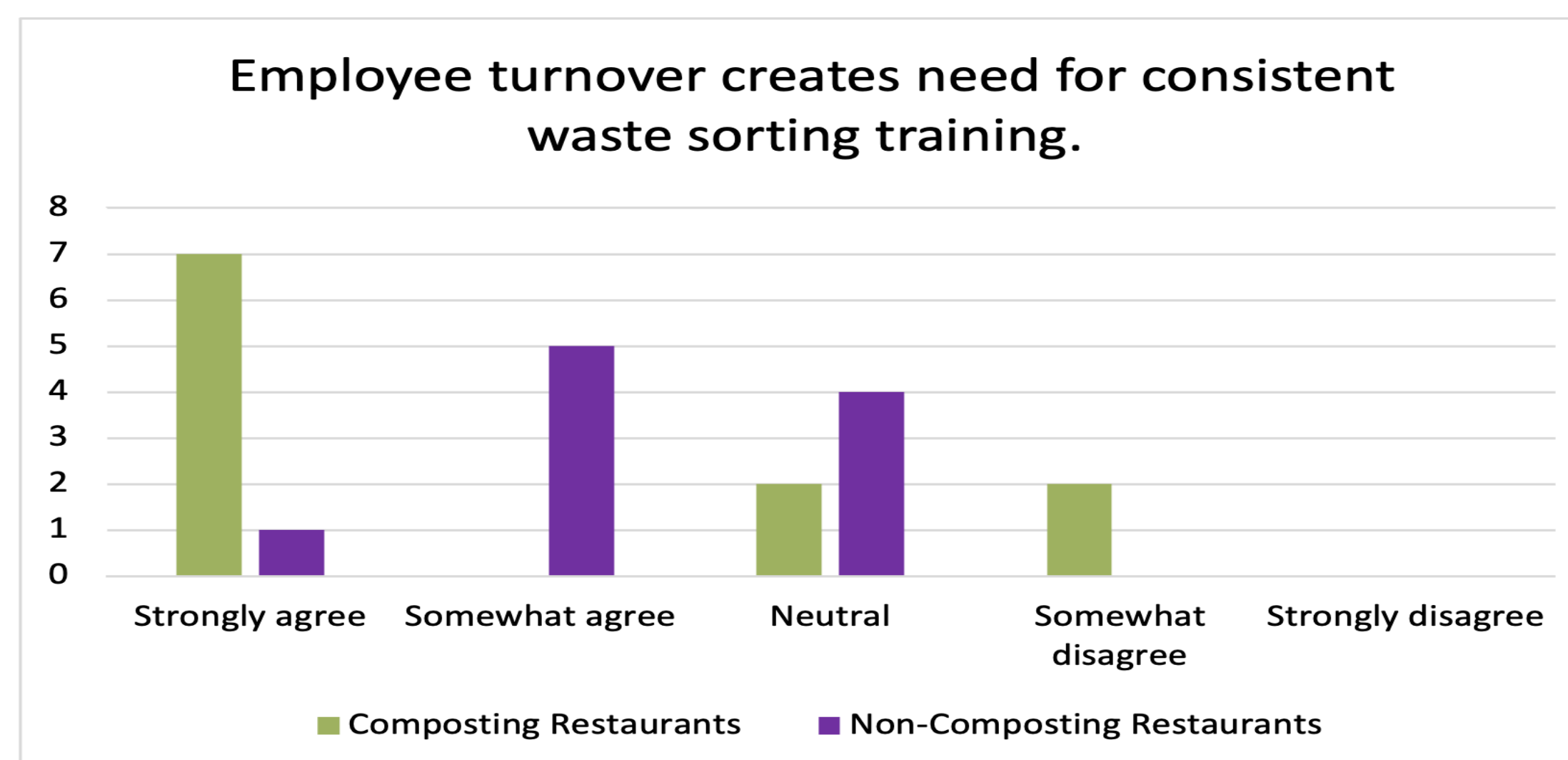


Figure 2. Survey responses on Likert scale resulting in 13 of 21 faster-food restaurants in agreement employee turnover causing need for consistent training.



Lack of accessible bins/supplies: need special materials to begin a program

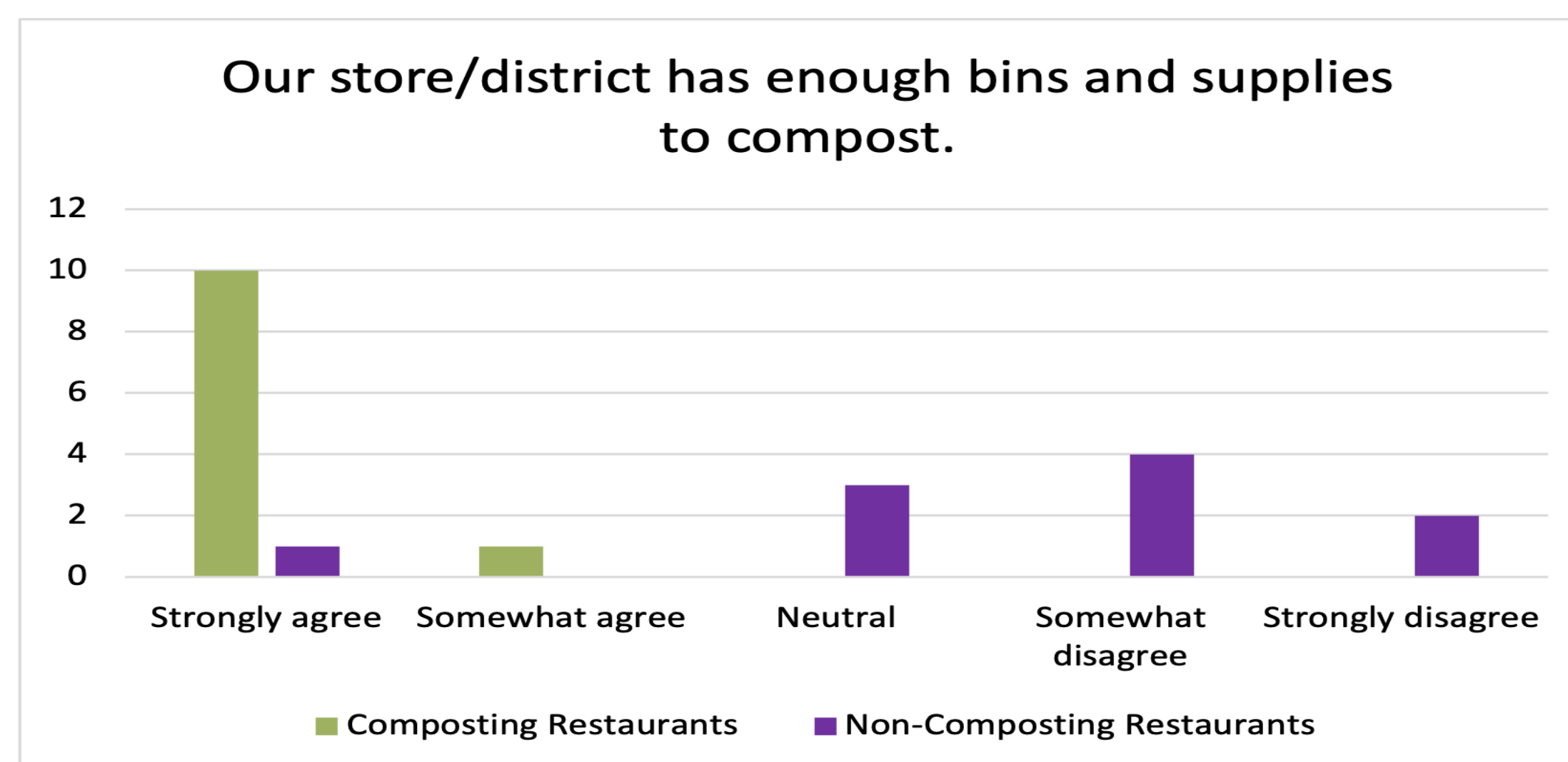
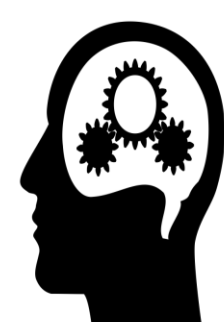


Figure 3. Survey responses on Likert scale displaying the low agreement of having enough bins/supplies in non-composting faster-food restaurants.



Lack of customer knowledge: causes contamination issues within the bin

"The hardest part is educating guests. They throw everything in the compost." - Multi-Unit General Manager
 "Customers will ruin this so fast and we don't have enough people as it is, let alone to teach/ fix customers mistakes." - Shift Supervisor

Results: Solutions



Local government subsidies for participating businesses



Updated signage and pamphlets from composting facilities offering services



Affordable packaging + supplies from large manufacturers

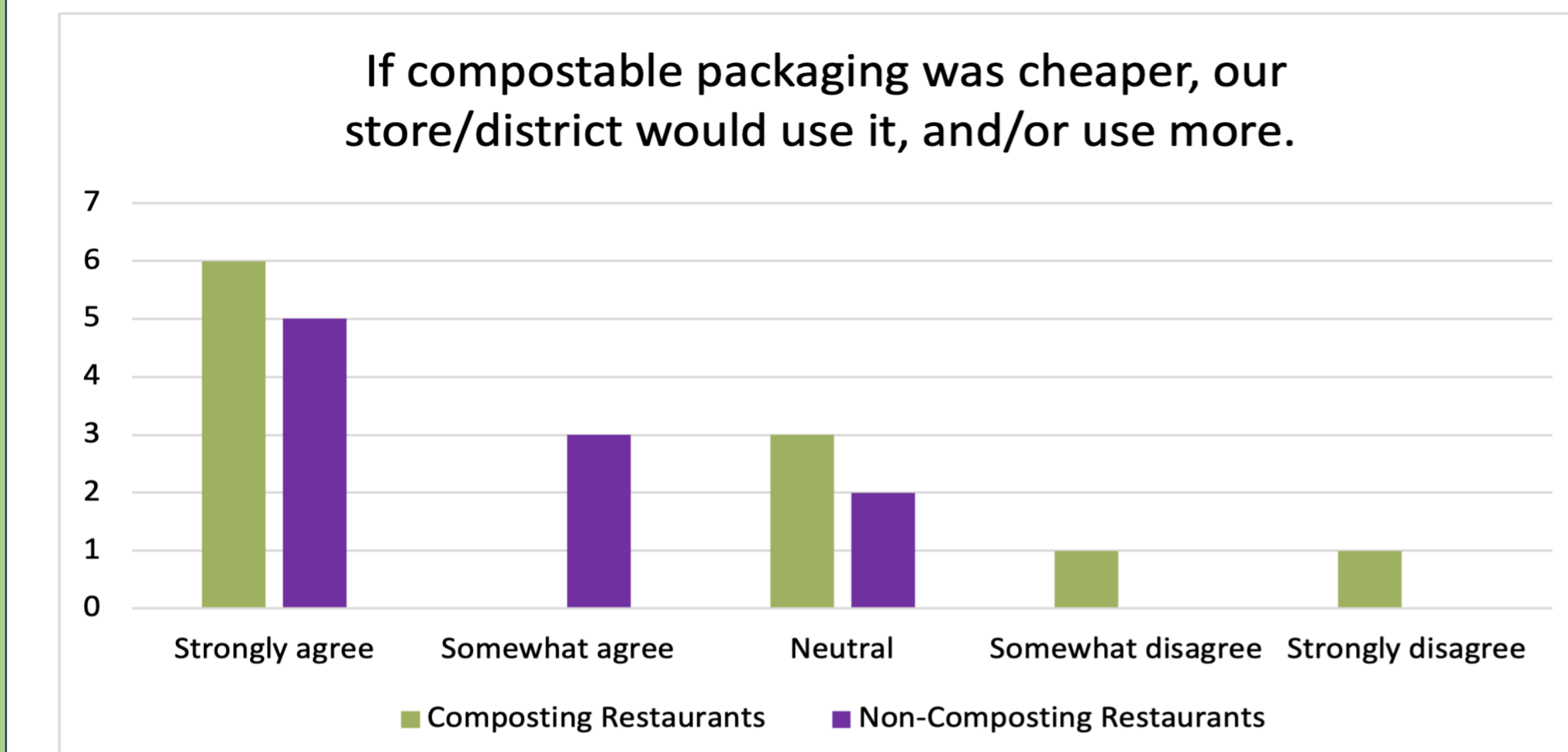


Figure 4. Survey responses on Likert scale resulting in 14 of 21 faster-food restaurants in agreement to the statement. The results support affordable packaging as an identified solution that will increase the willingness to compost in faster-food restaurants.

Broader Implications

- Local governments and programs could provide solutions to these obstacles while highlighting the benefits of composting.
- More restaurants may be more motivated to participate in composting and the program could expand to other cities.
- Other municipalities can enact codes like Seattle, WA by requiring all businesses to compost all organic waste.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my site supervisor, Maggie Brown, the Cedar Grove team, my faculty advisor, Eli Wheat, my cohort, and my family. I am so appreciative of the knowledge and support you have all provided me throughout this journey.