

CASE STUDY: LITTLE FOOD MARKET.

ELIMINATING SINGLE-USE CUPS AT A MULTI-DAY FOOD & DRINK TASTING EVENT.



Introduction:

The Little Food Market is a three-day event held each July at the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne. It began in 2024 and showcases over 200 food and drink makers from across Australia and New Zealand. The event attracts 30,000 visitors and has a mix of pre-purchased and on-the-day ticket sales.

The event offers a tiered ticketing structure that includes reusable options for all attendees. Ticket types include:

The Original 

Includes entry, returnable Bettercup, stage & 200+ AUS tastemakers

\$10 + BF




The Taster 

Includes entry, artist series wine glass, stage & 200+ AUS tastemakers


\$15 + BF



The Passionate 

Includes entry, tote bag, artist series wine glass, stage & 200+ AUS tastemakers

\$35 + BF




- **The Original** - entry + a **bettercup reusable cup**, which they return upon exit.
- **The Taster** - entry + a specially designed stemless wine glass as a keepsake
- **The Passionate** - entry, a specially designed wine glass and tote bag as keepsakes.

This structure allows patrons to participate in reuse regardless of their ticket type, while avoiding unnecessary gifting of merchandise to those who don't want or can't take it home.

In 2025, the event grew significantly and required many more cups than in 2024.

Due to limited availability of Bettercup rental stock that weekend, the event activated on-site washing to keep up with demand. The reuse system remained fully operational thanks to the flexibility of on-site washing, which helped manage higher than expected demand without compromising the patron experience.

Objectives.

The Little Food Market set out to:

- Provide a premium alternative to single-use cups that aligned with the event's values.
- Avoid unnecessary waste from gifted items that not all patrons wanted to keep.
- Offer flexibility through a tiered ticketing system that included both returnable and keep options.
- Ensure high return rates without relying on a deposit system.
- Maintain a seamless patron experience, even as the event scaled.



Patron Experience.

In 2025, **the reuse system was structured around a simple, non-deposit return model.** Reusable stemless wine cups were distributed to patrons at entry, with no upfront fee or deposit required. Patrons could return their cups at any time during the event by placing them in one of the clearly marked Bettercup return bins positioned around the venue.



Reusable stemless wine cups were distributed to patrons at entry.



Patrons could return their cups at any time by placing them in clearly marked Bettercup bins around the venue.

Free water stations were available throughout the event for patrons who wished to rinse their cups before reuse.

To reinforce the return process, door staff reminded patrons upon entry that cups were to be returned, and security staff who were stationed at exits encouraged patrons to return cups as they left the venue. Clearly marked return bins were placed throughout the venue, supported by consistent signage that guided patrons on where and how to return their cups. Full bins of returned cups were also positioned at exits to visibly demonstrate the correct behaviour and reinforce expectations.

This approach allowed for a streamlined experience that was easy for patrons to engage with, and supported high return rates.



Operational Considerations.

On-site washing was introduced as a contingency due to limited rental stock, made simpler by the venue's existing plumbing and electrical infrastructure. While originally not the preferred model, it enabled the event to maintain supply and uphold the reuse system without compromise. Staff managed the washer and manually polished cups to ensure a steady rotation back to patrons.

The unpredictability of on-the-day ticket sales made stock planning more complex, highlighting the need for flexible operational responses. Cups that had been mistakenly placed in recycling bins were recovered by cleaning staff who sorted the recycling bins. Door and exit staff played a key role in maintaining high return rates by communicating expectations and providing visible return infrastructure.

These operational elements supported a seamless experience and were instrumental in enabling the reuse system to function effectively under pressure.

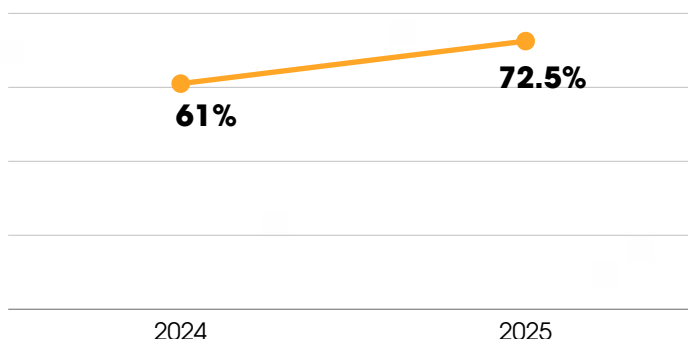
Return Rate Performance.

In 2024, the return rate for reusable cups was 61%. In 2025 the return rate increased to 72.5%, which was a good improvement despite the event doubling in attendance.

Typically, larger events present communication challenges that translate to lower return rates. However, the Little Food Market improved return rates by:

- Adding security and door staff reminders at entry and exit.
- Enhancing signage and visibility of return points.
- Creating a bin setup that clearly demonstrated where and how to return cups.

Return Rates: 2024 vs 2025.



Challenges.

Despite commitment by the event to ensure as many cups were returned as possible, some challenges remain. The event is attended by a wide demographic who may not have much experience in reusable systems and therefore need more education on the process of returning cups.

At busy, high volume events patrons are usually less likely to see and digest signage, and can be trickier to communicate with directly.

The stemless style cup is a desirable item for some attendees who decide to keep their cup even when they understand the system, particularly when there is not a monetary incentive to return it.



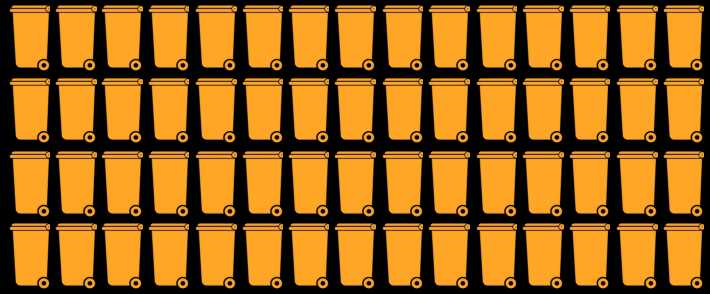
AS REUSE SYSTEMS GROW IN POPULARITY IN AUSTRALIA AND AROUND THE WORLD, IT'S EXPECTED THAT RETURN RATES WILL GENERALLY IMPROVE DUE TO INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF SYSTEMS AND REDUCTION OF THE NOVELTY OF TAKING REUSABLE ITEMS HOME.

Outcomes and Impact.

- **Over 400kg** of single-use waste avoided (approx. 62 wheelie bins).
- Return rates **increased from 61% to 72.5%** year-on-year.
- **Financial saving for washing on-site** compared to hiring the entire stock required.

These outcomes demonstrate the environmental and financial impact of a well-designed reuse system even under high-volume, unpredictable conditions.

400kg OF SINGLE-USE WASTE = 62 WHEELIE BINS.



KEY INSIGHTS.

- 1 On-site washing can reduce costs compared with hiring the full stock required and washing off site. On-site washing can be especially helpful when predicting attendance numbers is difficult.
- 2 Pre-entry communication and entry staff messaging are key to setting patron expectations.
- 3 Staff presence at exits significantly improves return rates. Choose staff who enjoy interacting with people in a one-on-one and crowd setting.
- 4 Manual sorting of recycling recovers misplaced cups and increases return rates substantially for high volume crowds who may not see signage.
- 5 Events often see return rates improve over time as patrons become more familiar with how reuse systems work and what's expected of them.

CONCLUSION.

THE 2025 LITTLE FOOD MARKET DEMONSTRATED THAT SCALABLE REUSE SYSTEMS CAN DELIVER STRONG ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES AND COST EFFICIENCIES WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE PATRON EXPERIENCE.

With clear planning, flexible operations, and smart communication, the event increased its return rates and significantly reduced waste.

As the event continues to grow, its reuse model provides a strong foundation for future sustainability efforts and as the event looks to grow and expand into Sydney in 2026.

