



Refillz SUPPORTING INFORMATION



Introduction

Martin and Sinead Wisely opened Co. Kildare's first zero waste store in Naas in September 2021 called Refillz. In August 2022, Refillz opened its' second store at SOLAS Eco Garden Centre in Portarlington, becoming the first zero waste store in Co. Laois. Refillz primarily sells wholefoods, cleaning supplies and eco-friendly products, supporting at least 50 Irish businesses.

Section 1: Company Background/Overview

We discovered our first zero waste store in Vancouver, Canada and began to change our shopping habits. Bringing our empty containers to fill up on our weekly shop. It became a habit and even when we moved around with our jobs, we sought out the local zero waste store.

After spending nearly five years on the west coast of Canada and looking to return home to Ireland, we embarked on our lifelong ambition to setup our own business. Upon returning home and setting up base in Kildare, we discovered that there were no zero waste stores in the county.

We became accustomed to zero waste shopping in Canada and found it extremely frustrating to be surrounded by plastic packaging in Irish supermarkets. It became apparent that if we wanted to shop this way in Kildare, we would have to setup our own store! In November 2020 we got to work on researching the potential of opening Kildare's first zero waste store.

Many months passed and countless hours were spent searching for vacant properties to rent in Kildare's main towns. From an early stage we set our sights on Naas as the ideal location for a new store and worked tirelessly to secure a base there. In June 2021, we got the keys to the premises and began the long task of building the store from scratch.

With a tight budget, we sourced as much as we could second hand. All the wood we used for the shelving was reclaimed and nothing went to waste, tying in with our zero waste ethos.



Category Entered: Waste Prevention Award

We entered the 'Waste Prevention Award' as the main goal of Refillz is to reduce packaging waste by allowing our customers to refill their own containers. Refillz aim of 'zero waste' runs right through its' operation from suppliers to customers. We only choose suppliers who will ship goods in minimal packaging and ideally no plastic packaging. If plastic is used it must be recyclable at the very least.

Any remaining is put into our own compost and the small amount of plastic packaging that is received is sent for recycling. We challenge all our suppliers to reduce their packaging and opt for more biodegradable or compostable material.

Food waste is exceptionally low at Refillz as the majority of food stocked has a long shelf life. In most cases the product will be sold before it reaches its 'best before date.'



Section 2: Description of Initiative



Refillz aims to become a community hub for zero waste shoppers and eco conscious consumers in both its' locations. With the goal of helping people reduce their plastic and packaging waste leading to a cleaner environment. We aim to reduce food waste, by offering food by weight, allowing consumers to decide the amount they want to purchase. Also, we aim to become a 'one stop shop' for a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle.

Set-Up/Running of the Business

The set-up of the zero waste store took approximately three months as everything was built from scratch. We felt to be truly sustainable the shelving for both stores should be built with reclaimed wood.

One of Refillz main objectives is to seek out sustainable, local suppliers who are also trying to build their business with a "green" focus. We are delighted to work with so many local, Irish suppliers such as Palm Oil Free Irish Artisan Soap, Tru Eco (Viva Green), Lilly's Eco Clean, Independent Irish Health Foods, Nik's Tea, ProKulture Kombucha, The Merry Mill, The Red Shed Organic Fruit and Veg, Ballymore Organics and Vico Deodorant to name a few.

These companies share our goal of making the supply chain "circular", not "linear", while providing our customers with high quality locally produced food and drink, household cleaning, personal care items and eco-friendly products.



When importing from abroad, we only use sustainable suppliers who are exceeding quality standards. Our main supplier, DO-IT Organics in Holland, are highly regarded, and supply produce mostly in paper or cardboard packaging. The small amount of plastic they use for packaging is fully recyclable or compostable.

Communication and Promotion

From the outset we have invested a significant amount of time promoting the zero waste retail model. As it's a relatively new retail model it takes time to build a significant customer base. We aim to give every new customer a full tour of the shop and explain to them the numerous benefits of shopping zero waste. We feel we are still in the 'education phase' of our operation and it will take time to expand this model to a wider audience. Take up has been very encouraging though and our customers are highly active in the local community promoting our zero waste store.

Naturally enough we have also embraced social media and the advertising opportunities that it presents to spread the word. We have also done interviews with local radio stations and newspapers and have been mentioned on national radio and newspapers on a couple of occasions.

Section 3: Achievements to Date

Our biggest achievement to date was winning the 'Green Micro Enterprise of the Year' at the 2023 Green Awards. This was a significant achievement for us to win a national award after only being in business for 18 months. We are also a finalist in the Retail Category of the Business Energy Achievement awards which will be held in September 2023. Also, in November 2021 we were included in an Irish Times article titled '72 of the best places to go food shopping in Ireland'.



Just by opening Kildare and then Laois' first zero waste stores was a huge achievement for us and to try a new retail concept that had never been available in both these counties. The towns of Naas and Portarlinton have embraced the new concept and we're growing month on month. The organisers of the Tidy Towns group in Naas shop with us and encourage others to do so to with the aim of achieving the towns' goal of winning the overall Tidy Towns award.

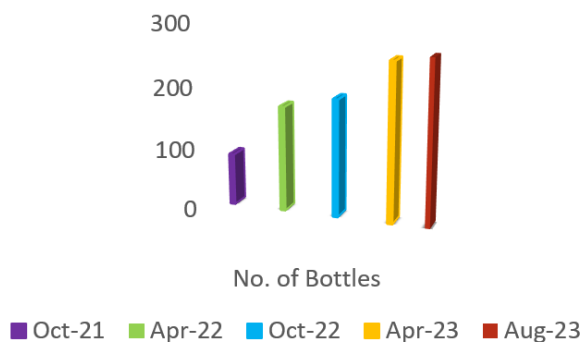
One element of the business that has exceeded expectations has been our 'Grind your own Peanut Butter' offering, allowing customer to bring their own jar and fill up on freshly ground peanut butter. It alone has attracted many new people to the refill concept and has greatly helped the business as a whole.

All elements of our business are focused on waste prevention, not only packaging waste but also food waste. The beauty of shopping at Refillz is that you leave with only the containers that you brought into the store and only the right amount of food or liquids that you required. Therefore, eliminating packaging waste and preventing food waste.

Since we opened our first shop, our household waste and shop waste combined is less than our previous household waste from when we were doing our regular shop at a supermarket. Our landfill bin was left out almost every six weeks before we opened the shop, now, that same bin only fills up after 18 months! The 'green' recycling bin was left out every two weeks before we opened the shop now it's left out once a month, but this now includes recycling waste from both stores! This example shows how much our customers are also benefitting from shopping zero waste and the knock on benefit of reduced bin charges.

We have seen increased interest and participation from the communities we serve. For example, household cleaning refills have more than doubled since we opened nearly two years ago. This is an amazing achievement not only for the business but also for the people of Kildare and Laois.

Cleaning Product Refills



Section 4: Future Focus

Refillz main goal for the future is to keep broadening our reach and customer base. We are proud of the fact that even after being in business for nearly two years now we are still introducing new customers to the zero waste refill model every day. We are always looking for expansion opportunities to enter new areas and grow the business organically.

We are always on the lookout for new sustainable products that we can stock on our shelves to offer our customers even more ways to reduce waste. We now stock about 450 sustainable products and it's growing steadily. Also, we are extremely proud that our business supports 50 other Irish businesses and when we look for new products, we always look to the Irish market first to work with local producers.



Due to the success of our peanut butter sales, we are now in the midst of producing our own range of nut butters. Our goal is to create great tasting nut butters at very competitive prices.

This side of the business will also align with our overall zero waste model whereby we'll encourage people to bring their jar back to Refillz to reuse. We will introduce our range to the local market initially through tastings at markets/events before launching nationwide.

Summary

Refillz aims to provide an alternative to mainstream supermarket shopping by offering a plastic and package free environment, where quality wholesome food and eco-friendly sustainable products are offered and competitively priced. Ultimately, we aim to help the people of Kildare and Laois to reduce their food and packaging waste.