

## Why Recycle - The Preserve Perspective

Each year, millions of Americans recycle [millions of tons](#) of materials—from glass to metals to paper to plastic—saving resources, preventing pollution, supporting healthy communities and creating jobs. Americans recycle about a third of their household waste, though some countries recycle much more (Germans recycle [62%](#)). At Preserve, we develop easy, practical programs to inspire consumers to recycle more, and to spur other companies to design for recyclability and take responsibility for “closing the loop” on their products’ life cycles.

### Recycling Saves Resources and Prevents Pollution

When we consider the full environmental costs of a product over its entire life—from raw material extraction, refining and manufacturing to its actual use and eventual disposal—the scales tip dramatically in favor of recycling. Preserve conducts life cycle assessments (LCAs) to quantify the environmental benefits of recycling with our Gimme 5 program and the results are similar to what we've seen with many other LCAs on plastics recycling: Recycling saves energy, water and other resources, while reducing pollution. With our Gimme 5 program, we cut resource usage by about half, compared to newly-produced (virgin) #5 plastic.

Furthermore, landfills and incineration are short-term approaches that do not build the "cradle to cradle": world that we wish to see for our future. Recycling is absolutely necessary for a practical and sustainable world in which "cradle to cradle" is the norm.

### Recycling Creates Jobs and Supports Healthy Communities

By landfilling valuable packaging materials, America annually wastes \$11 billion that could be spent to create jobs in local recycling supply chains, from the towns and haulers that collect recyclables to the materials recovery facilities and re-processors that convert those materials into usable feedstock for industry. In the US today, the recycling industry supports 500,000 jobs and \$90 billion in economic activity. (Data from [The Case for Extended Producer Responsibility for Post-Consumer Packaging](#). As You Sow)

While modern landfills are ostensibly “leak-proof,” the EPA does admit that all landfills will eventually fail. Towns that support recycling can pay less to have their waste recycled rather than landfilled. While collection and processing costs for recycling are often higher than for trash, recycling generates a revenue stream for towns that again tips the scales convincingly in favor of recycling.

Landfilling\*

\$60/ton cost to collect + \$20/ton cost to landfill = \$80/ton cost

Recycling\*

\$70/ton cost to collect + \$45/ton cost to process - \$90/ton in revenue after selling = \$15/ton cost

\*Costs are illustrative and will vary by location.

### Recycling Starts—and Ends—with You

The recycling infrastructure in America is expanding. The rise of single-stream recycling has expanded access to recycling programs for many Americans. Access to #5 polypropylene plastic recycling, in particular, has expanded in recent years from about 40% of US households to more than 60%. However, actual recycling rates for #5 plastics—the primary plastic we use in our products—are still unimpressive; the EPA reports #5 recycling rates are in the low single digits. Effective, truly sustainable recycling programs start with participation by motivated people like you—and ends with your purchase of products and packaging made from recycled materials.