

Single-Use Plastics Survey Results

April 2025

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Executive Summary

In May 2024, County Council asked staff to explore whether Beaufort County should improve and expand its 2018 Plastic Bag Ordinance. To guide this work, an ad-hoc committee of experts and community partners—including Keep Beaufort County Beautiful, the Coastal Conservation League, the Port Royal Sound Foundation, and multiple County departments, Planning & Zoning, Stormwater, Solid Waste and Recycling, and Communications and Accountability—was formed.

The committee designed two surveys (see *Appendix*) to test community and business support for regulating five common single-use plastics: thick plastic bags, Styrofoam take-out containers, Styrofoam cups, plastic utensils, and plastic straws. The surveys ran from January to April 2025 and during that time, the committee launched a countywide outreach campaign with media coverage, social media posts, chamber and business association partnerships, and door-to-door engagement in business districts. This effort produced 6,200 responses (6,062 residents and 138 businesses).

Results show strong public appetite for action:

- **Ban:** thick plastic bags, Styrofoam take-out containers, Styrofoam cups
- **By request only:** plastic utensils, plastic straws

The findings send a clear message—residents and businesses support reducing single-use plastics, with tailored strategies depending on the item.

Survey Results

Participation and Representation

Survey responses were well distributed across Beaufort County, suggesting the results reflect a region-wide perspective.

- **6,062 Residents (Figure 1):** One-third of responses came from Hilton Head/Daufuskie, one-third from Bluffton/Okatie, and one-third from communities north of the Broad River (Beaufort, Port Royal, Lady's Island, and surrounding areas).
- **138 Businesses (Figure 2):** Roughly two-thirds of responses came from south of the Broad and one-third from the north, generally mirroring county population trends.

Figure 2. Resident Survey Participants by Region

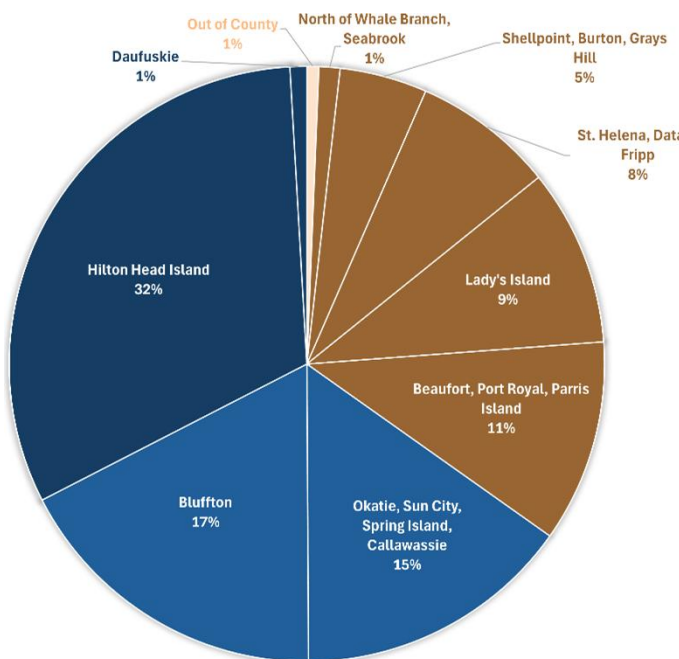
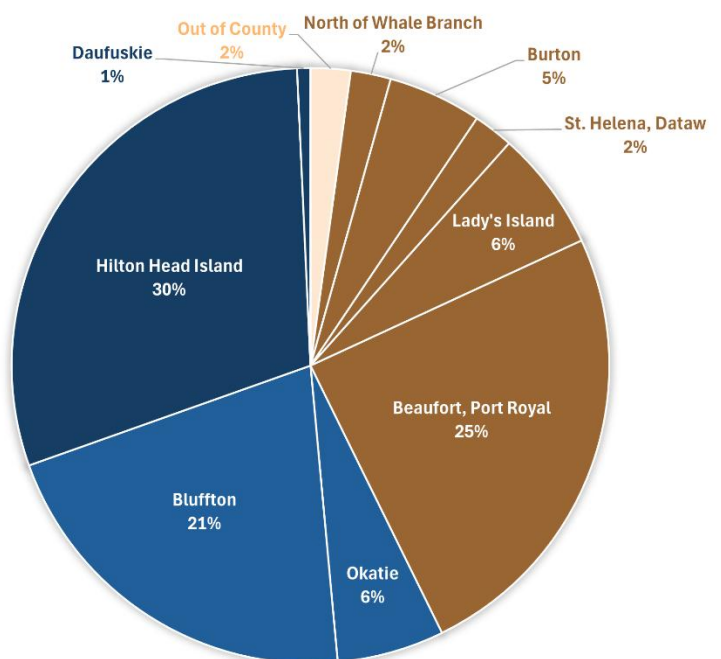


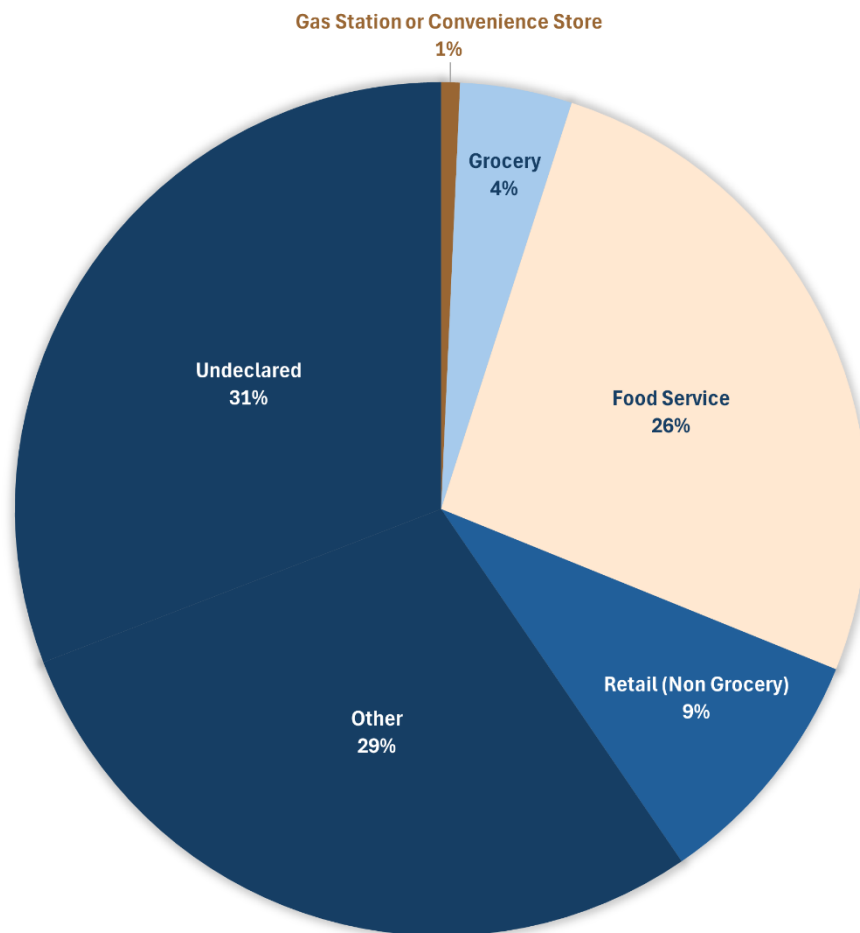
Figure 1. Business Survey Participants by Region



Business Participation

To better understand how impacts might differ across industries, a question identifying business type was added one month after launch. Of the 138 business participants, 69% reported their type: food service, grocery, gas/convenience, retail, or other. The remaining 31% did not specify and are grouped as “Undeclared”. (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Business Survey Participants by Type



Support for Regulating Single-Use Plastics

Both residents and businesses were asked about support for a complete ban on the five single-use plastics: thick plastic bags, Styrofoam containers, Styrofoam cups, plastic utensils, and plastic straws.

Figure 4. “How supportive are you of a COMPLETE BAN on the following plastic items?”

Figure 5. “How supportive would your business be for a COMPLETE BAN on the following plastic items?”

Participants could select from one of five options for each item: 1) Strong Support, 2) Moderate Support, 3) Neutral, 4) Moderate Opposition, and 5) Strong Opposition.

Results show:

- **Strongest support:** Styrofoam containers and cups. Residents supported bans by a 5:1 margin; businesses by a 3:1 margin.
- **Substantial support:** Plastic bags. Residents supported bans by a 4:1 margin; businesses by a 2:1 margin.
- **Mixed views:** Plastic utensils and straws. Residents favored bans roughly 2:1, but businesses were nearly evenly divided.

Figure 4. Residents' level of support for a complete ban on each of the single-use plastics.

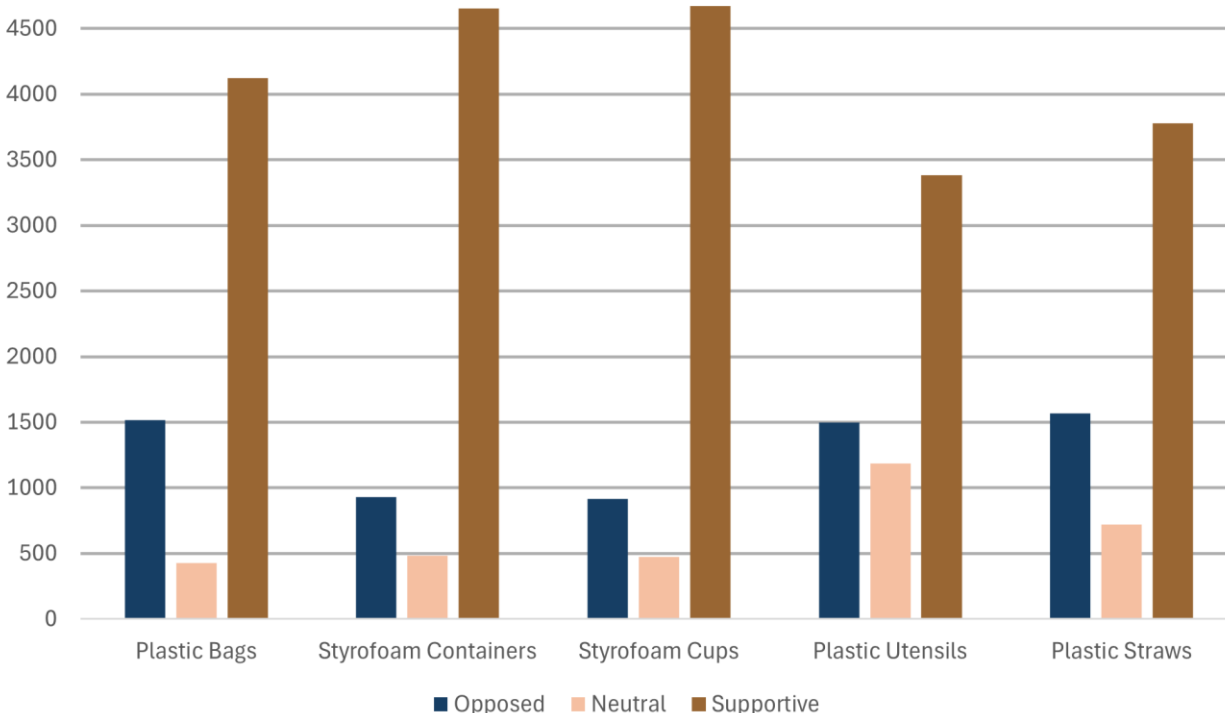
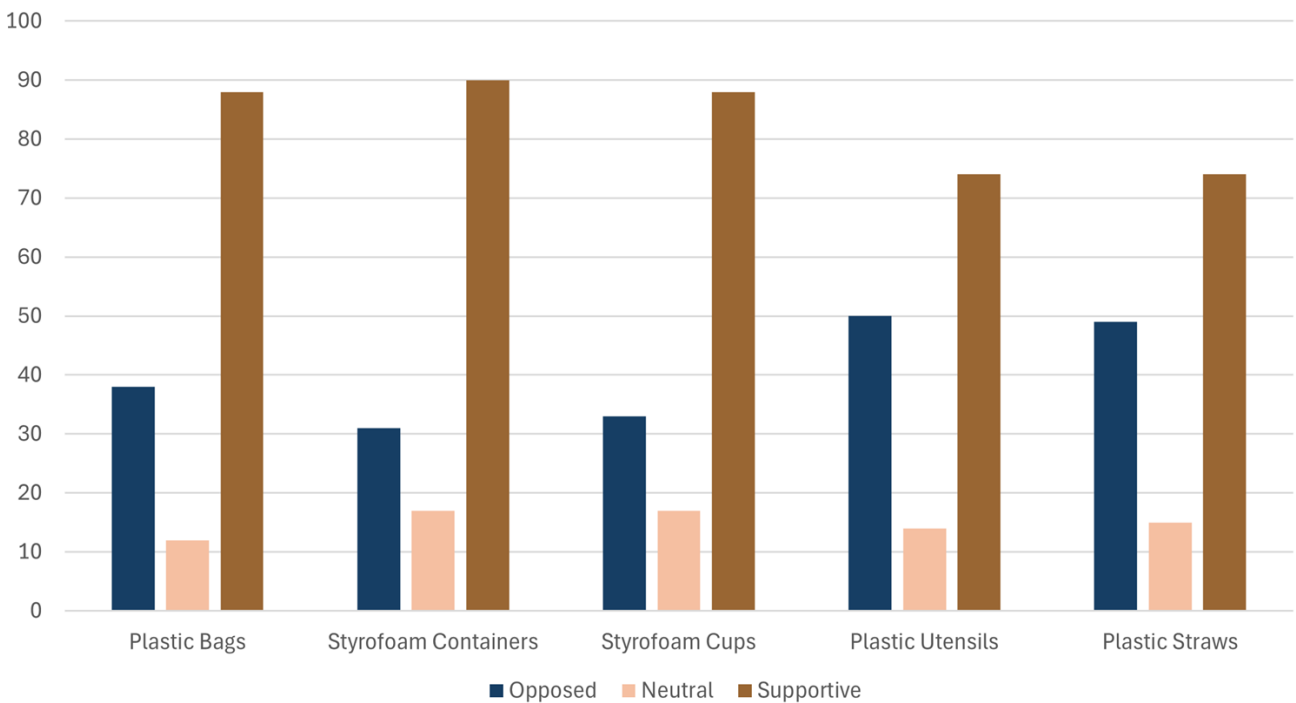


Figure 5. Businesses' level of support for a complete ban on each of the single-use plastics.



See appendix for breakdown of support/opposition responses.

Preferred Regulatory Strategies

Participants were then asked to choose the most effective approach for regulating single-use plastics—ban, customer fee, by request only, or no action.

Figures 6 and 7. “Which approach do you think would be most effective for reducing these non-biodegradable items from Beaufort County’s landfill and environment?”

- A **ban** legislatively outlaws these items.
- A **customer fee** charges customers a fee to receive these items.
- **By request only** means these items would only be provided if a customer requests them.”

Participants provided one preferred regulatory action for each of the single-use plastics from the following four options: 1) ban, 2) customer fee, 3) by request only, and 4) none of these.

Results show:

- **Bans:** Strongly preferred for plastic bags, Styrofoam containers, and Styrofoam cups.

- **By request only:** Preferred for utensils and straws. Residents and businesses leaned toward this option for utensils, but residents were split between by request only and bans for straws, where businesses favored bans.
- **Customer fees/no action:** Consistently the least supported strategies.

Figure 7. Resident recommendations for regulatory actions.

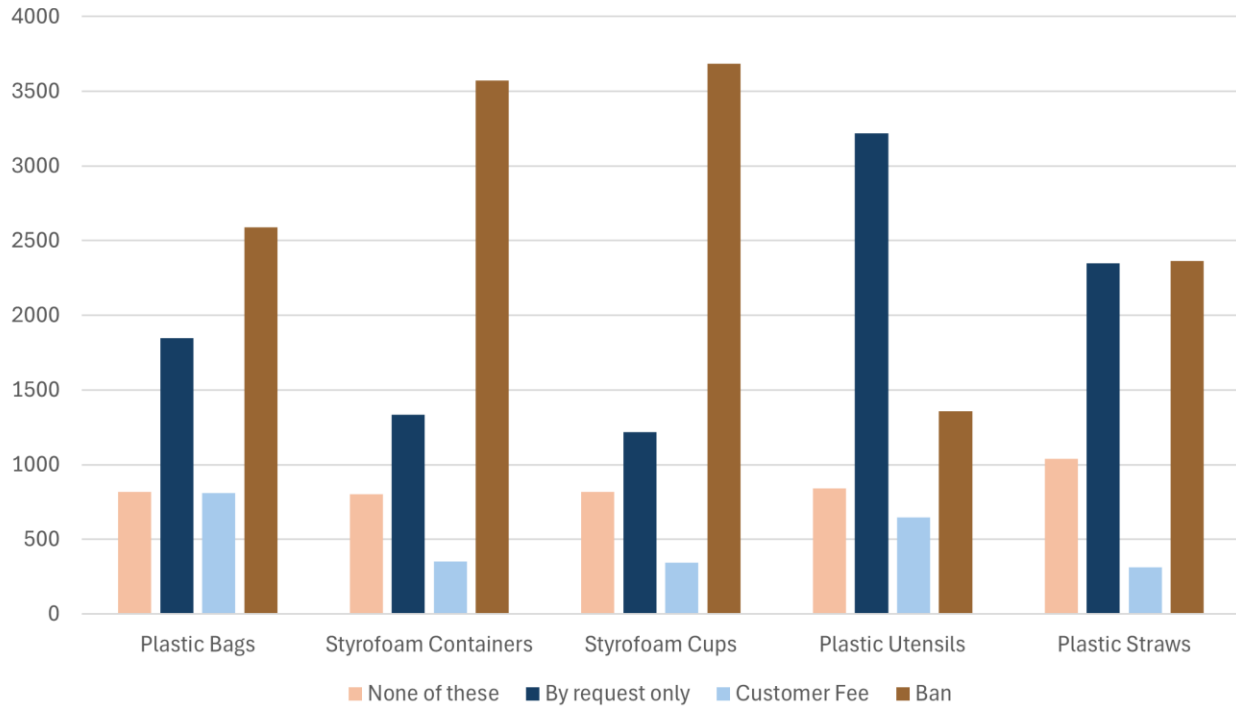
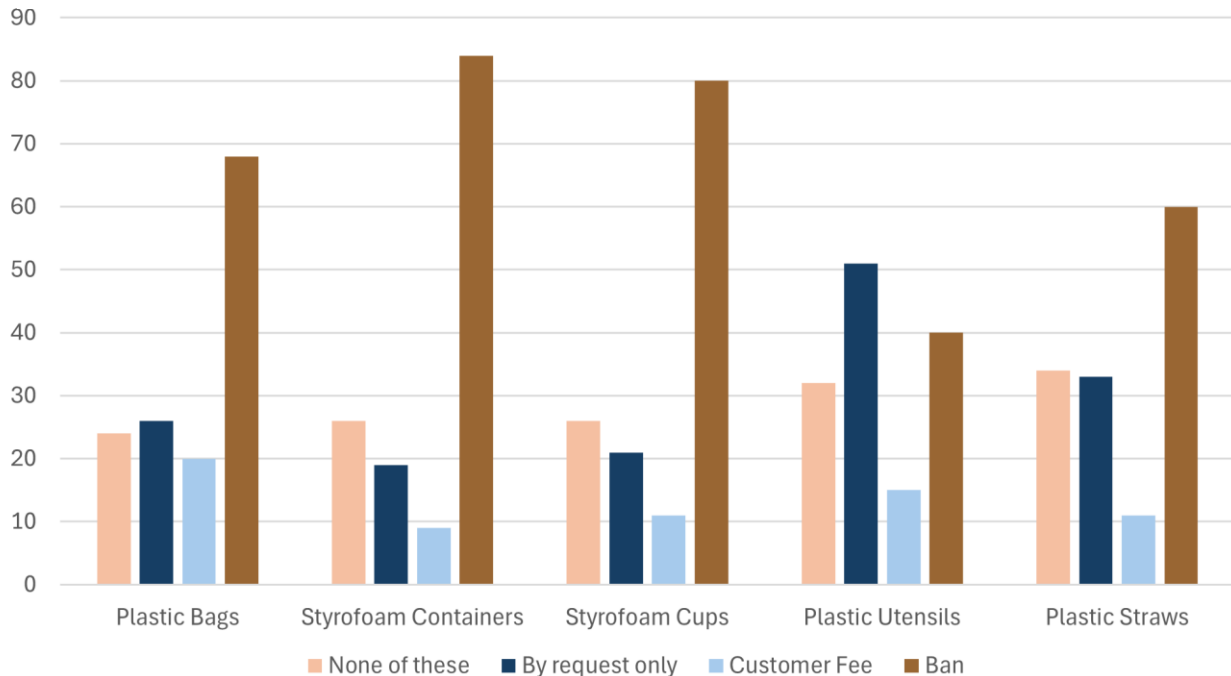


Figure 6. Business recommendations for regulatory actions.



Food-Related Business Responses

Given that food-related businesses will be most affected, their responses were analyzed separately (**Figures 8 and 9**). Food-related businesses represent Gas Station/Convenience, Grocery, and Food Service businesses. Of the 138 business responses, 44 (31%) were food-related.

- Food-related businesses supported bans on plastic bags and Styrofoam products at levels similar to the general business community.
- Opinions diverged on utensils and straws. Food-related business respondents were nearly evenly split between bans and opposition, with more resistance to banning these items compared to survey participants overall.
- Food-related businesses supported regulatory action similarly to survey participants for plastic bags and Styrofoam products, but were nearly evenly split between bans and by request only for plastic utensils, and bans, no action, and by request only for straws.

Figure 8. Food-related businesses' level of support for a complete ban on each of the single-use plastics.

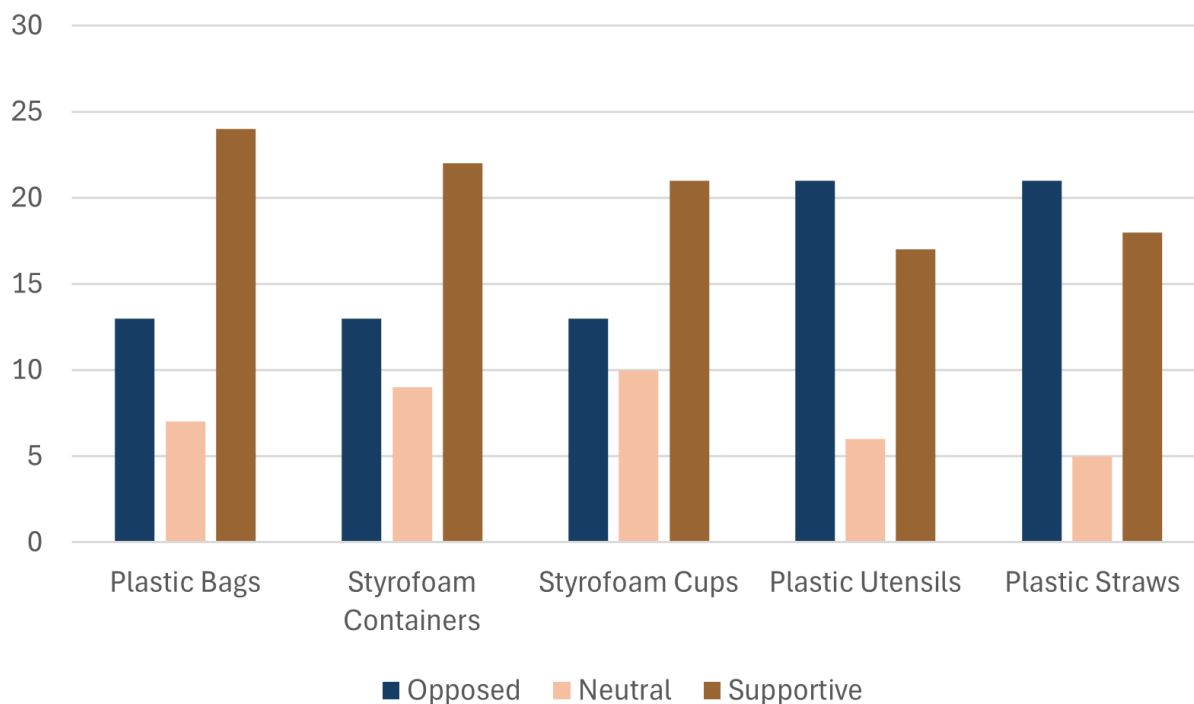
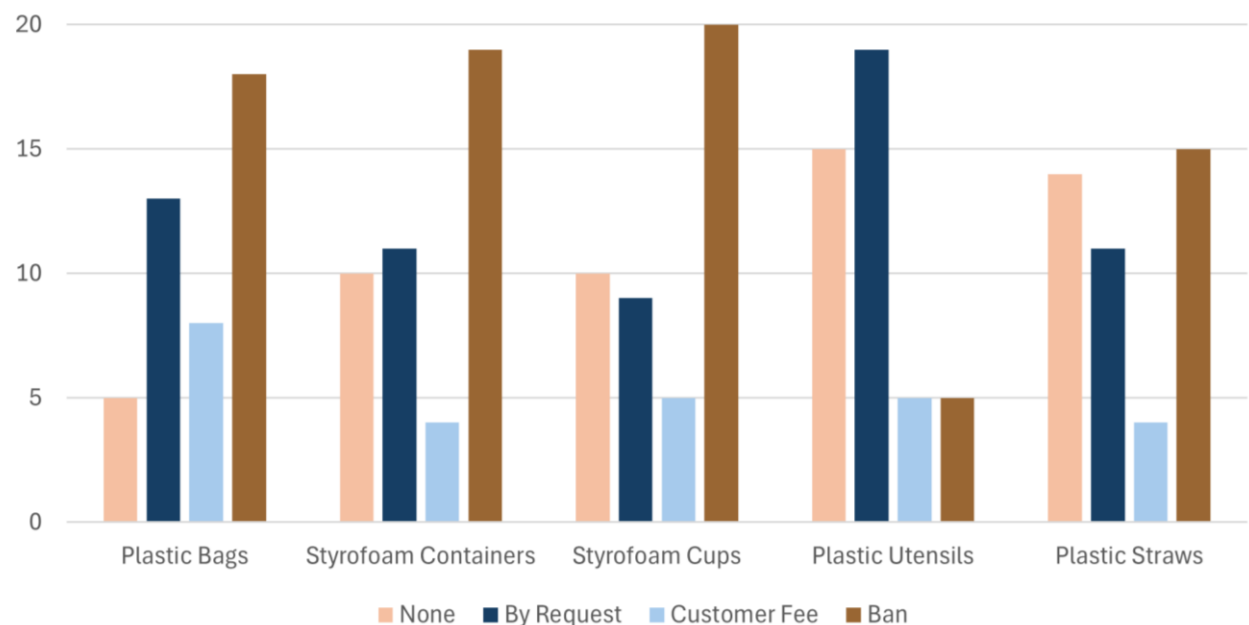


Figure 9. Food-related businesses' recommendations for regulatory actions.



Current Use of Single-Use Plastics

Survey questions also assessed how frequently these items are distributed or received.

Figure 10. Residents were asked “*How often do you receive the following items from food service businesses in Beaufort County?*” Participants could select from one of five options: 1) Always, 2) Often, 3) Sometimes, 4) Rarely, and 5) Never.

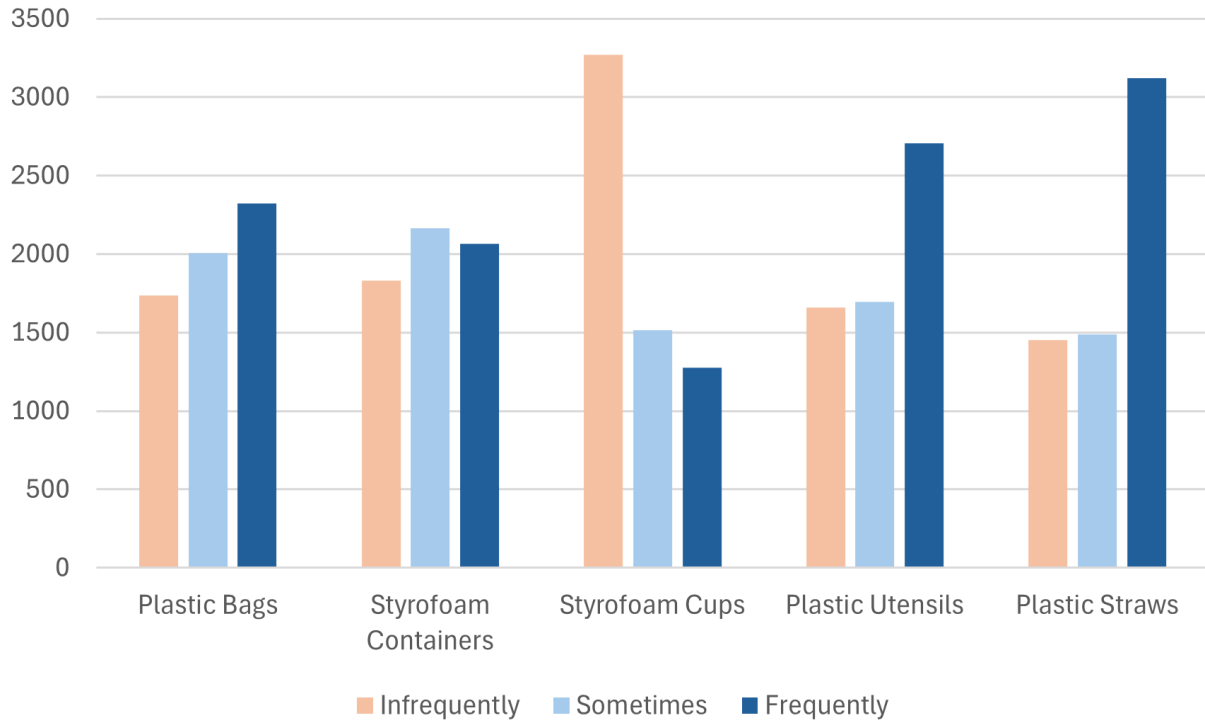
Figures 11 and 12. Businesses were asked “*How many of the following plastic items does your business distribute in a typical day?*” Participants could select from one of the following four options: 1) None, 2) Less than 150, 3) 150 – 500, and 4) More than 500.

Results show:

- **Residents:** Reported receiving utensils and straws most often, while Styrofoam cups were least common.
- **Businesses:** Confirmed these trends, with many not distributing plastic bags or Styrofoam products at all. In fact, the majority of businesses reported they do not distribute the five items, suggesting limited economic impact from regulation.

- Food-related businesses:** Most frequently provide plastic utensils and straws. Distribution of plastic bags and Styrofoam cups is less frequent but more businesses provide them than don't. Styrofoam cups were evenly split, about as many businesses provide them as don't.

Figure 10. Frequency of receiving single-use plastics for Residents.



See Appendix for breakdown of frequency of receipt.

Figure 11. Daily distribution amounts of single-use plastics for all business participants.

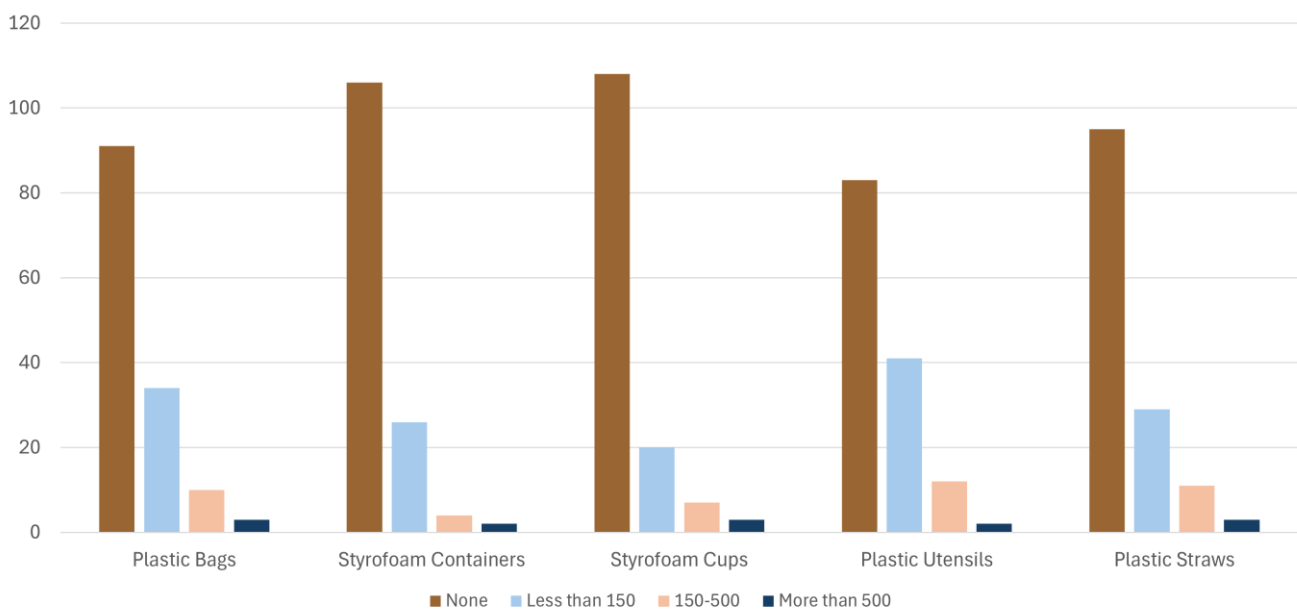
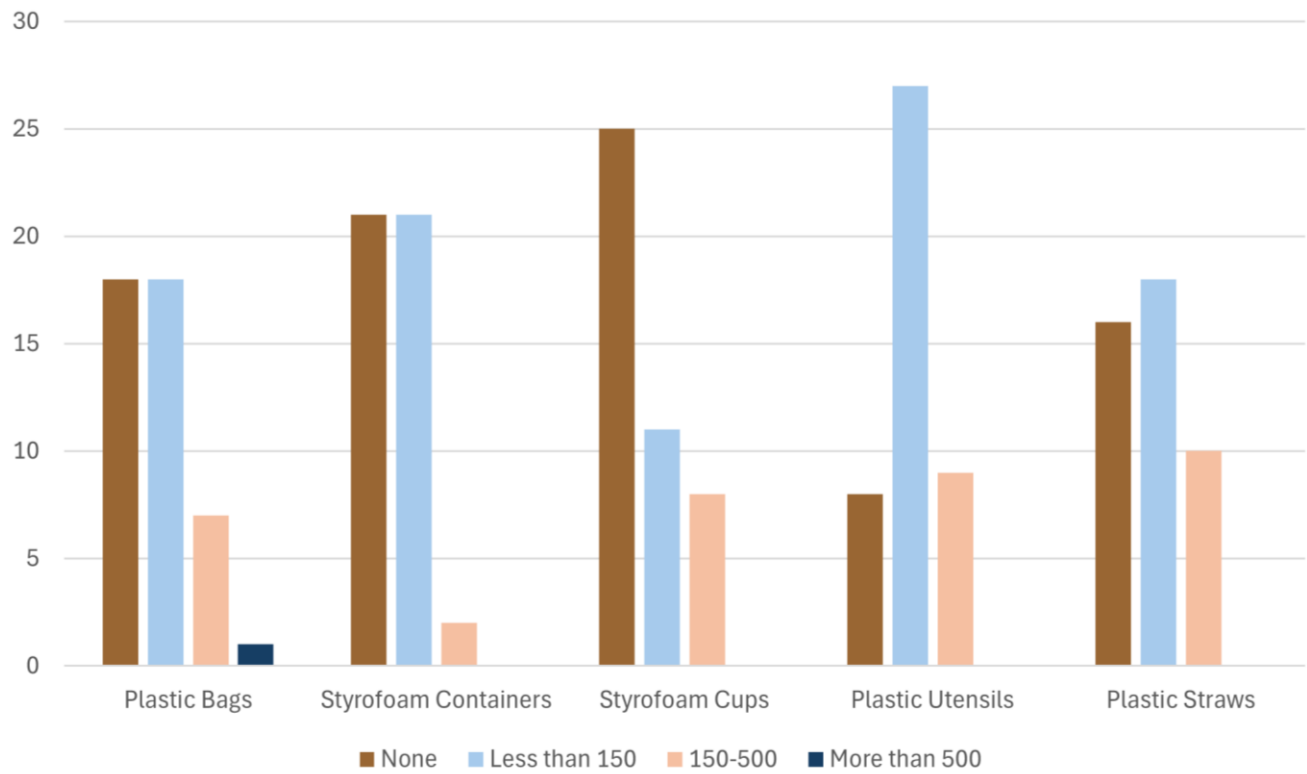


Figure 12. Daily distribution amounts of single-use plastics for food-related businesses.



Disposal and Reuse

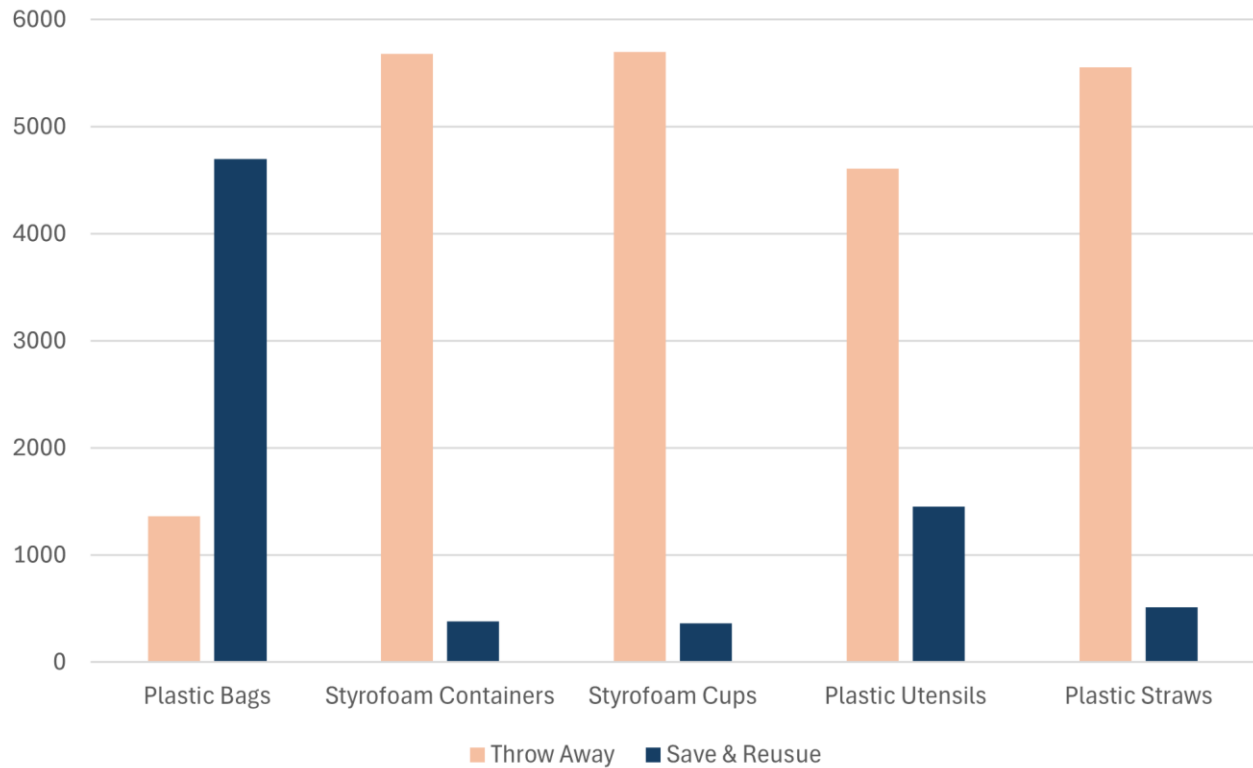
The survey also determined what happens to these items once received by residents.

Figure 13. Residents were asked “*What do you normally do with each of the following items after you get them?*” Participants could select from one of two choices: 1) Throw Away and 2) Save & Reuse. Because none of these items are accepted in the Municipal Solid Waste curbside-recycling system, “Recycle” was not offered as an option. Plastic bags can be recycled, but only at select drop-off locations.

Results indicate:

- **Primarily discarded:** Styrofoam containers and cups, straws, and utensils are overwhelmingly thrown away, with minimal reuse.
- **Some reuse:** Plastic bags are most likely to be saved, typically for a single secondary use (e.g., trash liners), before disposal.

Figure 13. Resident's disposal and reuse of single-use plastics



Summary

Overall, survey results reveal broad public and business support for stronger regulation of single-use plastics. The majority favor **bans on plastic bags and Styrofoam products** and **by-request-only policies for straws and utensils**.

Appendix – Additional breakdown of results.

Figure 15. Breakdown of Resident levels of support or opposition.

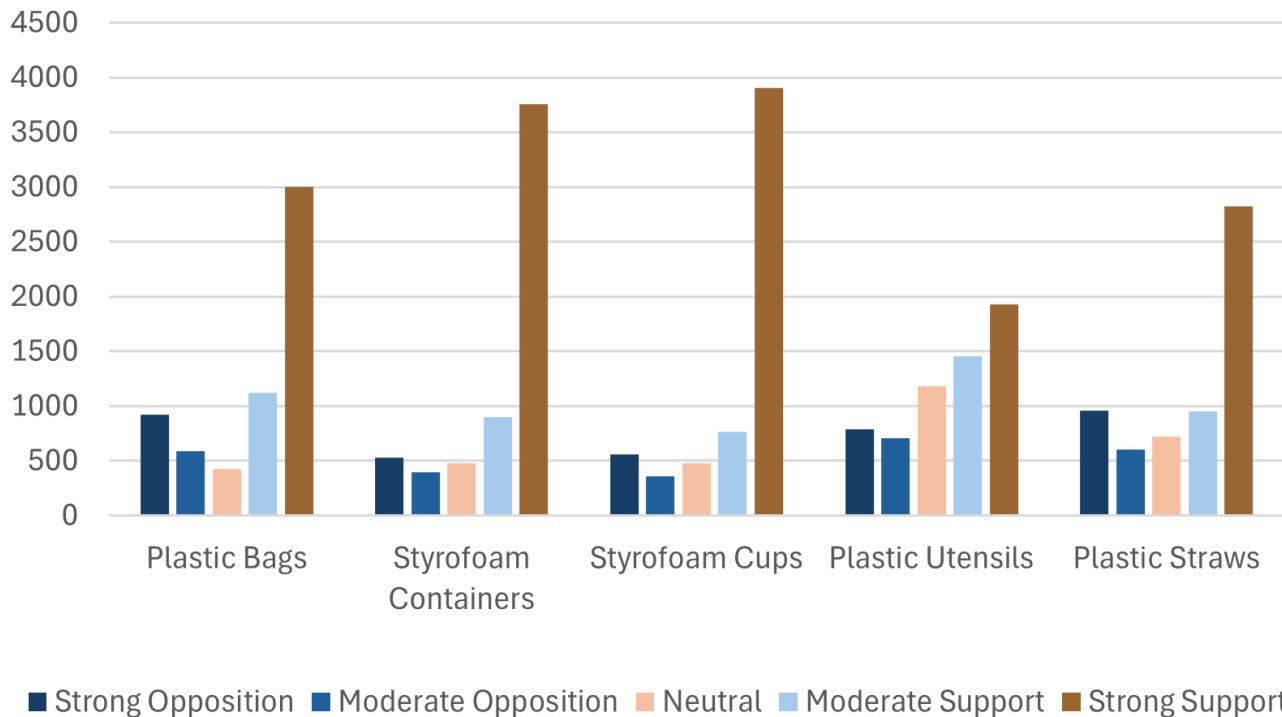


Figure 14. Breakdown of Business levels of support or opposition.

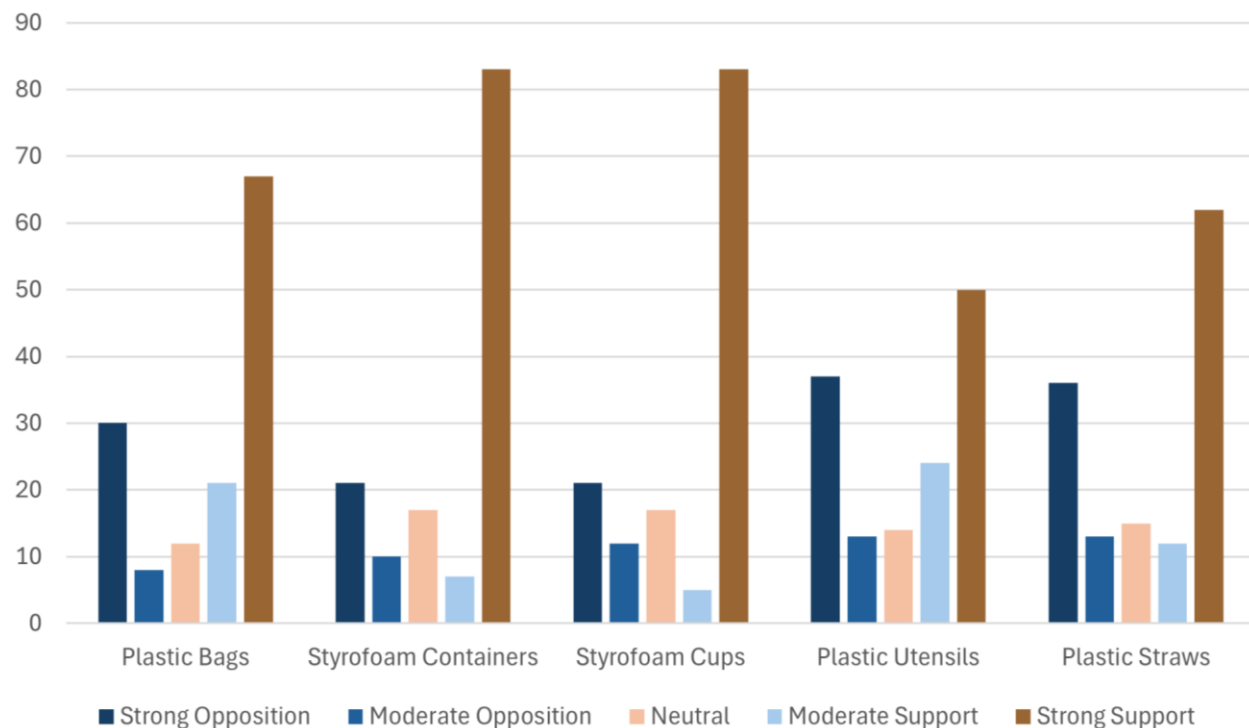


Figure 17. Breakdown of Food-related business levels of support or opposition.

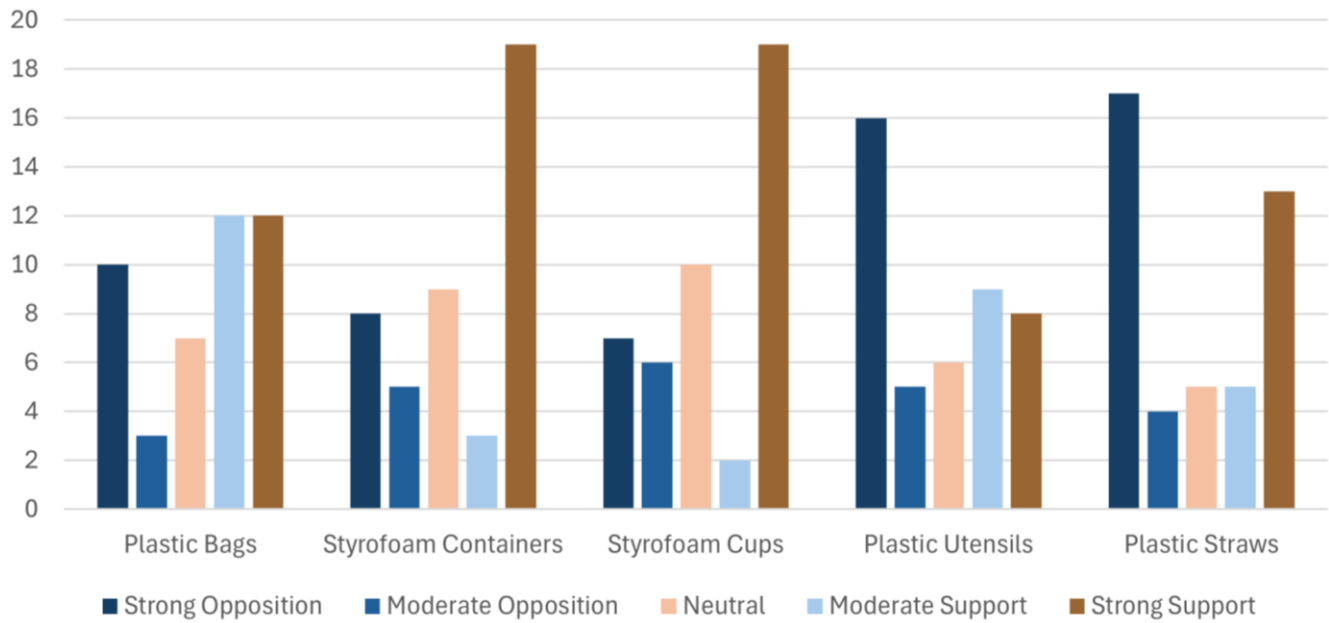
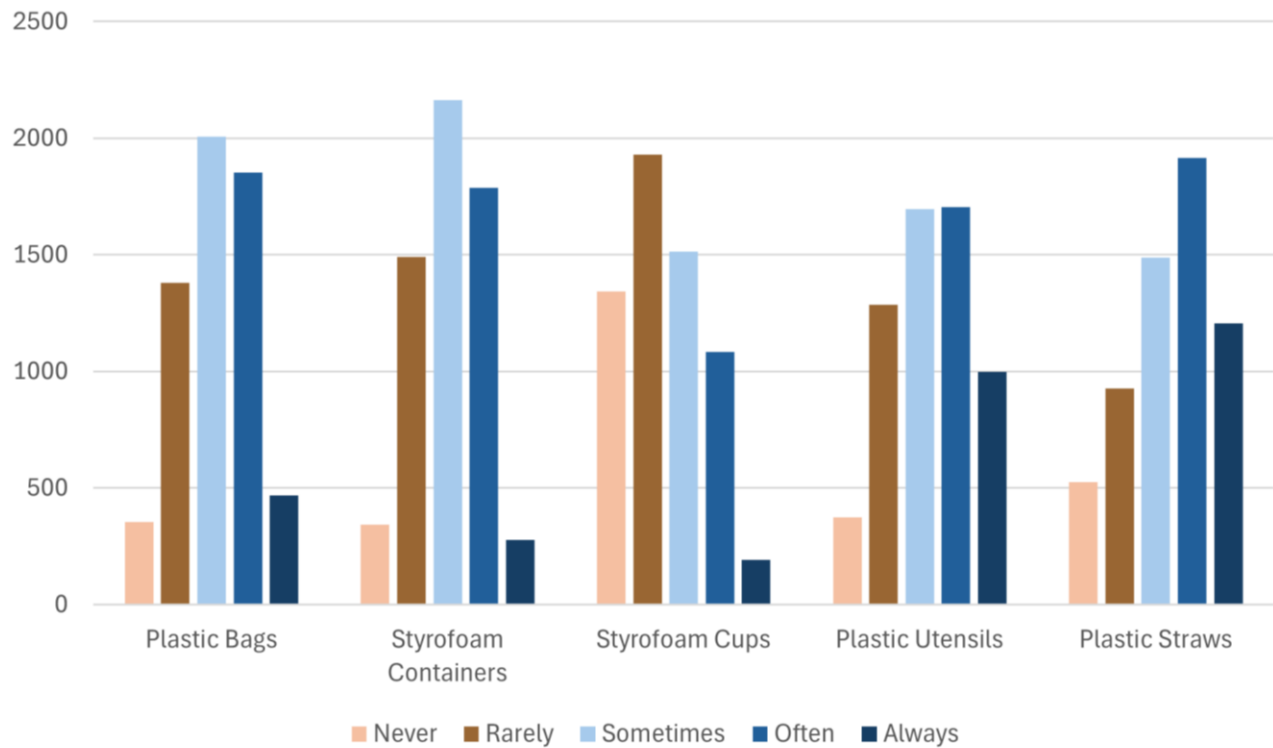


Figure 16. Breakdown of frequency of receiving single-use plastics for Residents.



Plastic Reduction Survey for Consumers

In 2018, Beaufort County passed an ordinance that limits the use of thin, plastic, single-use bags. Since then, there has been an increase in the use of non-biodegradable items such as heavier plastic bags, plastic utensils and straws, and styrofoam cups and carry-out containers, which pose significant long-term threats to our environment. The County is evaluating the issue and considering ways to alleviate the negative impact on our community. The following survey will help us make an informed decision for the future of Beaufort County, its businesses and residents.

1. How often do you receive the following items from food service businesses in Beaufort County? *

Plastic Bags

- ☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

Styrofoam Containers

- ☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

Styrofoam Cups

- ☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

Plastic Utensils

- ☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

Plastic Straws

- ☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

2. What do you normally do with each of the following items after you get them? *

Plastic Bags

- ☐ Save & Reuse ☐ Throw Away

Styrofoam Containers

- ☐ Save & Reuse ☐ Throw Away

Styrofoam Cups

- ☐ Save & Reuse ☐ Throw Away

Plastic Utensils

- ☐ Save & Reuse ☐ Throw Away

Plastic Straws

- ☐ Save & Reuse ☐ Throw Away

3. Which approach do you think would be most effective for reducing these non-biodegradable items from Beaufort County's landfill and environment?

- A **ban** legislatively outlaws these items.
- A **customer fee** charges the customer a fee to receive these items.
- **By request only** means these items would only be provided if a customer requests them. *

Plastic Bags

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None of These

Styrofoam Containers

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None of These

Styrofoam Cups

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None of These

Plastic Utensils

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None of These

Plastic Straws

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None of These

4. How supportive are you of a COMPLETE BAN on the following plastic items? *

Plastic Bags

- ☐ Strong Support ☐ Moderate Support ☐ Neutral ☐ Moderate Opposition ☐ Strong Opposition

Styrofoam Containers

- ☐ Strong Support ☐ Moderate Support ☐ Neutral ☐ Moderate Opposition ☐ Strong Opposition

Styrofoam Cups

- ☐ Strong Support
- ☐ Moderate Support
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Moderate Opposition
- ☐ Strong Opposition

Plastic Utensils

- ☐ Strong Support
- ☐ Moderate Support
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Moderate Opposition
- ☐ Strong Opposition

Plastic Straws

- ☐ Strong Support
- ☐ Moderate Support
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Moderate Opposition
- ☐ Strong Opposition

5. ZIP Code *

Select option

6. Do you have any additional comments? (optional)

7. Email (optional)

name@example.com

8. Would you like to receive additional communications regarding this topic? Beaufort County will never share or sell your information.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Submit

Plastic Reduction Survey for Business Owners

In 2018, Beaufort County passed an ordinance that limits the use of thin, plastic, single-use bags. Since then, there has been an increase in the use of non-biodegradable items such as heavier plastic bags, plastic utensils and straws, and Styrofoam cups and carry-out containers, which pose significant long-term threats to our environment. The county is evaluating the issue and considering ways to alleviate the negative impact on our community. The following survey will help us make an informed decision for the future of Beaufort County, its businesses and residents.

1. How many of the following plastic items does your business distribute in a typical day? *

Plastic Bags

- ☐ None ☐ Less than 150 ☐ 150 - 500 ☐ More than 500

Styrofoam Containers

- ☐ None ☐ Less than 150 ☐ 150 - 500 ☐ More than 500

Styrofoam Cups

- ☐ None ☐ Less than 150 ☐ 150 - 500 ☐ More than 500

Plastic Utensils

- ☐ None ☐ Less than 150 ☐ 150 - 500 ☐ More than 500

Plastic Straws

- ☐ None ☐ Less than 150 ☐ 150 - 500 ☐ More than 500

2. Which approach do you think would be most effective for reducing these non-biodegradable items from Beaufort County's landfill and environment?

- A **ban** legislatively outlaws these items.
- A **customer fee** charges the customer a fee to receive these items.
- **By request only** means these items would only be provided if a customer requests them. *

Plastic Bags

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None Of These

Styrofoam Containers

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None Of These

Styrofoam Cups

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None Of These

Plastic Utensils

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None Of These

Plastic Straws

- ☐ Ban ☐ Customer Fee ☐ By Request Only ☐ None Of These

3. How supportive would your business be for a COMPLETE BAN on the following plastic items? *

Plastic Bags

- ☐ Strong Support ☐ Moderate Support ☐ Neutral ☐ Moderate Opposition ☐ Strong Opposition

Styrofoam Containers

- ☐ Strong Support ☐ Moderate Support ☐ Neutral ☐ Moderate Opposition ☐ Strong Opposition

Styrofoam Cups

- ☐ Strong Support ☐ Moderate Support ☐ Neutral ☐ Moderate Opposition ☐ Strong Opposition

Plastic Utensils

- ☐ Strong Support ☐ Moderate Support ☐ Neutral ☐ Moderate Opposition ☐ Strong Opposition

Plastic Straws

- ☐ Strong Support ☐ Moderate Support ☐ Neutral ☐ Moderate Opposition ☐ Strong Opposition

4. If your business already uses plastic or styrofoam reduction strategies, please describe them here. (optional)

5. Do you have any additional comments? *(optional)*

6. Your Business Name *(optional)*

Maximum 255 characters

0/255

7. Business ZIP Code *

8. Email *(optional)*

9. Which of the following categories describes your business? (Check all that apply) *

☐ Gas / Convenience Store

☐ Grocery

☐ Food Service

☐ Retail (Non Grocery)

☐ Other

Submit

