Reducing lunchbox landfill items... some suggestions for yoghurt.

In preschool bins we find:

- **Small tubs:** (4% of total volume of material to landfill in preschools) containing yoghurt, fruit, custard or jellies that may be recycled at home and preschool after rinsing. At school however, these usually become a landfill item as they can't be rinsed for safe recycling.
- **Squeezie pouches and tubes that can NOT be recycled. Because of the style of container or quantity provided, there is often food wastage too.**

What can we do about this?

In recent years the variety of smaller packaged dairy products for younger consumers has increased dramatically, with no signs of slowing.
It is worthwhile encouraging parents to consider whether dairy (or meat) products are essential during the preschool/school day. These food groups can be included in breakfast or after school/preschool snacks. Remember that while preschool sites may often have refrigeration available, this is rarely the case in schools, and we have found larvae in uneaten meat sandwiches in school bin audits!

Manipulating both single use and reusable insulated containers can be challenging for preschoolers. This can mean a considerable amount of staff time is spent helping to open fiddly lids. Some sites encourage families to practice at home to ensure that children can open containers they bring.

If your community is keen for yoghurt - **consider a yoghurt 'levy' option, or make your own yoghurt on site (easier than you might think).** We've provided an example below to outline how a yoghurt levy can look. This can save families considerable $$, make money for the site, reduce waste disposal costs, reduce odours and teach students valuable skills.

'Sustainability Preschool' has 40 families and 40 students/day.

Each day, about 10 students bring yoghurt in tubs or squeezies - collectively costing around $10/day.
Children often can't eat it all, so even though they bring close to 1kg/day, only around 500mL is eaten.
Staff spend a lot of time opening lids and washing out small tubs for reuse or recycling.
Over 2000 containers/year are sent to landfill and in Term 1 and 4 the bins get quite smelly from packaging with food residue.
Families collectively spend at least $50/wk = over $2 000/yr on sending single use yoghurt to preschool.
Individual family spending is up to $5/wk = $200/yr.

The preschool decides to offer a 'yoghurt levy' to families.
This option costs $10/term for families whose children like yoghurt. The levy could be incorporated into fees.
The site buys favourite flavours and natural yoghurt in 1 or 2kg containers (sometimes more nutritious than small, single use options) which also saves storage space in the fridge.
Children, staff or volunteer parents dish out appropriate quantities/flavours into small cups or bowls, allowing children to practice motor skills by eating with a spoon. After eating, children wash up in a tub, with washing water tipped onto the garden.

This model :
Saves $$ for individual families - save $160/yr (with yoghurt levy of $40/yr rather than $200 spent on small single use serves), plus time saved on shopping and adding items into lunch bags/boxes.
Saves the site - space in fridge, waste collection $$ costs and odours.
Saves 2000 containers or more (and residual food) from going to landfill! See what half that amount looks like over the page. You could copy and display the number your site may generate in a year.
Generates $1 200/yr (with 40 families at $10/term) or more depending on site, minus the cost of purchasing yoghurt.

In term 4 - aim to reduce or phase out yoghurt to prepare students for school.
Foods which are quicker to eat are encouraged, as student eating times at school will be greatly reduced!

Reducing landfill items.. the challenges with yoghurt (approx 960 suckers on this page)