

Recycling leftover meat and fish? It's all part of Canada's circular economy

West Coast Reduction turns the proteins into fats and oils to make new products

The rendering business is sometimes known as 'the silent industry,' given the public's perceived unwillingness to hear about how rendering works. But companies like West Coast Reduction Ltd., which collect and recycle leftover meat, fish and bakery products, are proud of their contribution to a more sustainable economy.

For decades, Vancouver-based West Coast Reduction has been taking food waste and by-products from over 13,000 farms, restaurants and supermarkets across Western Canada and turning this material into ingredients used in various products.

"What we do is a perfect example of a circular economy," which is the continuous use of resources, says Jared Girman, West Coast Reduction's director of government relations and strategic initiatives.

West Coast Reduction has six industrial rendering facilities, from Saskatoon to Nanaimo, B.C., capable of converting leftover meat and fish by-products into the basic components of protein, fats and oils. A seventh plant in Chilliwack, B.C. performs a similar process for leftover bakery items. The protein meal is used in pet and animal feed, while the fats and oils — known as lipids or tallow — are sold to companies in the oil and gas and chemical industries and used to make products like soap and cosmetics and, more recently, as biofuel feedstock.

Mr. Girman says the positive environmental impact is so substantial that, if the company's primary rendering plant at the Port of Vancouver disappeared and the raw material had to be composted or landfill, about 120,000 metric tonnes of additional greenhouse gases would be emitted into the atmosphere each year. That's equivalent to adding about 26,000 vehicles to the road, based on emissions data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

West Coast Reduction's suppliers — the farmers, food producers, grocery stores, bakeries and restaurants that provide the raw materials — are incentivized to work with the company, Mr. Girman says.



Workers at West Coast Reduction collecting materials for processing at its plant at the Port of Vancouver.

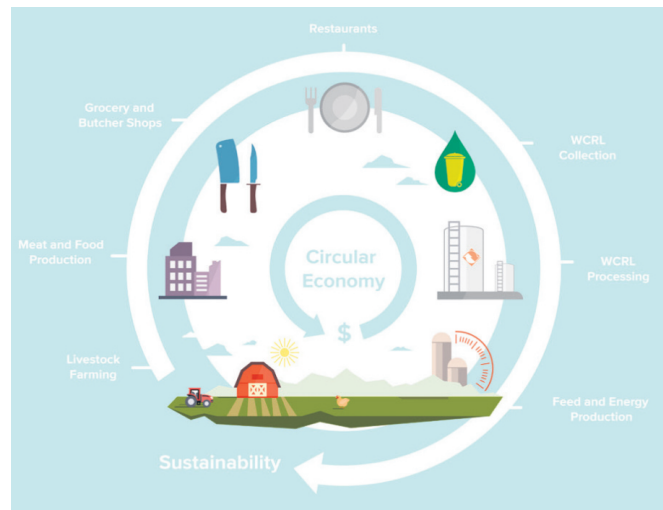
Not only do they get paid for their by-products, but the suppliers avoid paying trucking and tipping fees to drop their leftovers in a landfill or composting facility.

The result, Mr. Girman says, is not only good for the environment but also for consumers' wallets because it helps food providers keep their costs down.

"We really help to keep local food costs low; it's another key aspect of what we do," Mr. Girman says.

Alice Irene Whittaker, communications director for The Circular Economy Leadership Coalition, says West Coast Reduction's main business of taking materials that would otherwise become waste and using them for something new is "definitely" a part of a circular economy model. However, to be truly sustainable, she says companies contributing to the circular economy must also ensure they're reducing their own waste.

"It needs to be part of a holistic set of solutions that would start with reducing consumption in the first



A West Coast Reduction diagram outlines the circular flow of its rendering business.

place," she says.

West Coast Reduction plays a role in that as well. The company has a retail brand called Redux that collects millions of litres of used cooking oils per year and recycles them into new ingredients for

other products. Redux operates a dispatch program that picks up the used cooking oil from a variety of businesses ranging from small restaurants to commercial kitchens. It makes the process appealing to participating businesses by offering

lockable containers to store the used oil between regular pickups.

West Coast Reduction is one of three major rendering companies spread across Canada: Central Canada is serviced by Rothsay, owned Darling International Inc., while Sanimax Industries Inc. handles most of the rendering needs in Eastern Canada.

The industry's goal, Mr. Girman says, is to play whatever role it can in facilitating Canada's transition to a cleaner, more circular economy.

"When you think about what we do, it really is about the sustainability of Western Canadian agriculture and the ability for this country to have a sustainable and thriving local food system," he says. "If we're not around, then the sustainability of Western Canadian agriculture grinds to a halt."