While unelected billionaires and sycophant cabinet members are *pretending* to get rid of waste in Washington, I've declared war on waste, fraud, and abuse in my own Los Angeles home. My family is fighting food and plastic waste using a pair of recycling subscription services. Yes, I realize it's just a small ripple in the sea of bullshit that is 2025 so far, but hey, you have to start with the things you can control, right? And my own waste stream fits that bill. Read my colleague Alex Wang on his own personal environmental action in the Trump 2.0 era: through hot water. There's also a national economic boycott today.

But we started with food. In Fall 2023, our family of three signed up for a Mill – that's a food recycling bin that's billed as "odorless and effortless." It's a sleek, white, WiFi-connected smart device. Imagine if Apple designed a trash can.

During the day, we feed it all of our kitchen scraps. Around bedtime, we hear the scheduled click, signifying it's locking down for the night, followed by a soft purr as it starts to process, heat, and grind the scraps. After a few weeks of this, the bin is filled to the brim and we dump the dried grounds into a prepaid box and put it out with the mail. It gets sent to Pacific Northwest to be (we're told) disbursed to small farms for things like chicken feed. The company says you can use the grounds as compost at home, but since the bin acts as a dehydrator, what's left over lacks the same nutrients of real compost.

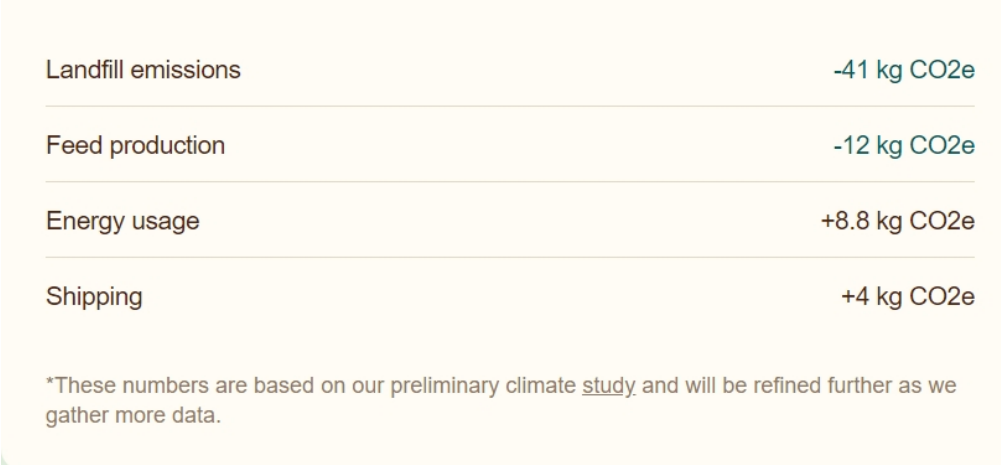
Personally, I love the thing because it feels like it's absolving me of one of my gravest sins: feeding landfills. I've spent the last 20 years trying (and mostly failing) to regularly compost our waste. And as a household that cooks, and eats, most meals at home, we have a lot of it.

Professionally, however, I resent that a sustainable, circular economy for food waste remains out of reach and instead has to run on my own guilt, shame, and privately funded subscription. But put that aside for the moment.

How are we doing on diversion? So far, we've sent back 8 boxes of the stuff. The box we sent in the middle of February was 12 lbs of dry food grounds that look a lot like compost or soil. That's 12 lbs created over 3-4 weeks. That amount of material can be turned into feed for 6 chickens to eat over the course of a month. Diverting it from the waste system removes 40 kg of C02 equivalent emissions, or 105 miles driven in a gas-powered car, according to Mill, which has conducted some basic climate studies. Mill says my family has rescued the equivalent of thirteen 12-gallon bags of trash.

In a small way, this is a climate solution. Uneaten scraps and food waste are the most common material going to landfills and most of it comes from homes. Anyone who cooks at

home frequently for children, or even just themselves, can testify to that. Sad lettuce, moldy bread; half an apple that sat out too long; unwanted pizza crust—"pizza bones" as we call them. We now throw them all in the bin. I can't even imagine how many uneaten bowls of peas and carrots I have sent to LA County landfills during the first 8 years of my son's life, but it was a lot. Then there's all the vegetable trimmings and fruit peels we accumulate. Avocado peels, orange rinds, date pits, kale stems. All of that waste adds up to a whole lot of methane — a greenhouse gas 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. Yay us.



Landfill emissions	-41 kg CO2e
Feed production	-12 kg CO2e
Energy usage	+8.8 kg CO2e
Shipping	+4 kg CO2e

*These numbers are based on our preliminary climate study and will be refined further as we gather more data.

Next up: our single-use plastic problem. Like most American households, we're awash in the stuff. I'd like to blame the kid and his candy habit but it's also all our groceries and toiletries.

So, this month we finally signed up for Ridwell, which aims to sustainably reuse and recycle most non-foodstuffs. They give you a bin (my life is full of bins) and a series of canvas bags to sort and store waste of different kinds — plastic film, batteries, light bulbs, old clothes. Basically all the stuff that you *want to believe* is recycled so you toss it in the municipal blue bin even though deep down you know there's no way it's getting recycled (and is in fact probably clogging up the municipal recycling system). Then every two weeks or so, a vehicle picks up your stuff and finds ways to reuse this hard-to-recycle material.

We just started, because Ridwell only this month started servicing our area of Los Angeles a few weeks ago. We're still getting used to washing all the foil yogurt lids and saving all those granola bar wrappers that we used to toss out. It feels good to keep this whole other category of waste out of our trash can. Hell, I barely take the trash out anymore. But here

again, it sure feels like I'm having to atone for my sins by paying the price of a Netflix subscription for proper waste management. And that's not a sustainable, or equitable, way to manage the waste stream. Is there a better way?

When it comes to organic food waste, the city of Los Angeles and state of California are indeed making strides. The city's sanitation department now has a curbside organics recycling program, which it rolled out a couple years ago after the state passed SB 1383, a law requiring all cities, counties, institutions, residents and businesses to divert food and other organic waste from landfills. As some news stories have pointed out, renters in large apartments and homeowners in large condo complexes have struggled. Unfortunately, that includes us and 300 of our dearest neighbors. Property managers must enroll in the program with recycLA, but enforcement is lax. I know because I'm fairly sure it's our HOA's fault that 3 years later we still don't have curbside organic bins. So we'll keep feeding our Mill for now, but it's far from affordable for all 300 units in our complex to be outfitted with a W-Fi trash can.

The situation with single-use plastics is more concerning. California passed the landmark SB 54, a comprehensive piece of legislation aimed at significantly reducing single-use waste. That extended producer responsibility law, which UCLA's California Environmental Legislation and Policy clinic supported with research, is intended to reduce all sorts of single-use waste and shift responsibility to industry over the next few years. The problem is we don't yet have the detailed regulations for the law, which have been the subject of negotiation for more than two years by the various stakeholders. The regs are supposed to be finalized by March 8 or else risk starting all over. And the governor's office and CalRecycle, charged with implementing the law, have not been commenting in the press.

What SB 54 illustrates is that the devil's in the details. Corporations and their trade organizations have spent a lot of time arguing that this and that shouldn't be covered by the regulations even though the parties essentially agreed to the bill's framework with some limited compliance flexibility. While they lobby and run out the clock, our waste is piling up and we're losing time to shift to a more environmentally-friendly system and educate consumers about it. Here's hoping that California can meet the moment and implement the ambitious goals set out in the law. Maybe I won't need my Ridwell subscription for too much longer.

Because here's the thing. At this dangerous moment, when idiot renegades are trying to break the federal government, including the environmental agencies and policies that make our lives better, there's something heartening about looking at what I can do in my own household to cut down on waste. It's like a victory garden for the climate. It has a small impact, including on my mental health. That's not nothing. But really it's system-wide changes that we need.