Sport organizations are advancing waste reduction efforts by hosting zero-waste events. Zero-waste is a philosophy that encourages the redesign of resource life cycles so that all products are reused. Efforts at sporting events include programs, environmentally preferable purchasing, composting food waste, educating staff and attendees on the “why” behind the programs being offered, and ensuring that post-game clean up diverts and separates materials into their most useful categories (Zero-Waste International Alliance, 2009).

Zero-waste efforts make a positive environmental impact, yet fan reception of these efforts by the fanbase is less certain. Success is partly reliant on fans’ knowledge of zero-waste. This study focused on a collegiate football program’s stadium in the second year of a zero-waste initiative, providing an opportunity to garner perceptions. The purpose of this study was threefold: 1. To understand whether fans were aware of a collegiate football program’s efforts toward zero waste in the stadium; 2. To examine whether or not fans knew what zero-waste represents; 3. To examine what actions fans took toward reducing their environmental impact.

Participants (N = 214) were sampled across three college football events during the 2016 season. Participants were approached in situ during pre-game tailgating to complete the survey in person, and demographic information (e.g., gender, age group, race) was recorded on a log sheet. The non-proportional quota sample was composed of 56 students, 31 young adults (aged 21-29), 80 adults (30-54), and 47 seniors (55 and over).

Participants were initially asked about awareness, yielding a closed-ended response from the entire sample. Additional questions were open-ended, and responses were captured using a recording device. Responses were transcribed utilizing an open inductive coding process following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) inductive thematic analysis procedure.

Low Awareness. Results for question one found a majority (71.5 percent) of the sample population were unaware that the football stadium was striving for in-stadium zero waste on game days.

Continuum of Knowledge. Related to the meaning of zero-waste, the responses revealed that levels of zero waste knowledge were spread across a continuum ranging from no knowledge to full knowledge. Interestingly, fans with partial knowledge confused zero-waste with recycling, which suggests that the transfer of knowledge between these related concepts is inconsistent. Additionally, the key element added to stadium operations, composting, was clearly not recognized in a majority of the sample due to low recognition of what zero-waste represents.

Minimizing Waste. Unsurprisingly, responses from fans’ environmental game day efforts resulted in a prominent action theme of recycling along with minimizing waste.

The results clearly showed that more marketing/communication of zero-waste efforts is warranted due to a lack of awareness. Further discussion/recommendations/implications will be discussed in the presentation.