

HB 171 – Yard Waste, Food Residuals, and Other Organic Materials Diversion and Infrastructure Study

**Study Group Meeting
March 19, 2018 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM**

Minutes

Attendance: Keith Ohlinger, Maria Myers, Christy Bujnovszky, Lisa Kardell, Mark Mhley, Linnea Boogades, Rhody Holtahus, Brenda Platt, Peter Houstle, Patrick Serfass, Peter Ettinger, Roni Neff, Ben Fischler, Taylor McCandless, Gemma Evans, Jeff Dannis, John Sullivan, David Mrgich, Mike Ensor, Steven Birchfield, Laura Catell Noll, James Ley, Frederick Strye, Alan Pultyniewicz, Lori Finafrock, Doug Meyers, Tariq Masood, Gary Felton, Julia Mooney, Kaley Laleker.

On the phone: Susan Wexler, Chris Clark, Jane Thery, Mary (last name unknown)

Introduction

Workgroup Members briefly introduced themselves. Keith Ohlinger is representing the Maryland Farm Bureau.

Dave Mrgich provided an overview of changes to the structure and logistics of the meetings. He also added that there have been changes to the original order of study topics to be covered. The next meetings are tentatively scheduled.

Dave asked for approval of the January Meeting Minutes. Ben Fischler noted that he was on the phone for the January meeting. Eileen Kao (in writing) corrected a statement that was incorrectly attributed to her regarding utilizing compost on turf fields. Julia Mooney will make the changes to the official minutes. The minutes from the January meeting are approved.

Dave presented research (via PowerPoint Presentation) compiled by Tariq Masood on the current status of infrastructure for diversion of yard trimmings, food scraps, and other organics. The presentation and materials are available online. The maps were provided by Johns Hopkins University Center for a Livable Future.

Yard Trimmings

The following comments were made on the yard trimmings infrastructure portion of the presentation.

- It was noted that the composting facility located at Alpha Ridge Landfill is expanding.
- Tariq Masood added that all facilities in Table 2 of the issue paper are permitted and will hopefully be in operation in 2018.

- Peter Houstle asked the extent to which all facilities will accept materials outside of their jurisdiction. Tariq responded that we do not know but we can gather that data. Peter added that Maryland Recycles Network (MRN) is getting a lot of inquiries concerning where materials can be taken.
- Patrick Serfass explained that there are two kinds of anaerobic digestion (AD) systems: wet and dry. Wet systems process material with a soup-like consistency and dry systems are airtight, sealed and accept yard trimmings. There are a dozen dry anaerobic digestion facilities in the U.S. They are easier to manage. Patrick recommended using generic terms that will include processes besides composting and mulching, such as recycling organics, recycling food scraps or recycling yard trimmings.
- Jane Thery seconded the idea.
- Brenda Platt noted that the eastern shore region is underserved with organics processing capacity. She asked where the yard trimmings in that region are going. Dave responded that we do not have that information and we would need to contact the counties. Brenda asked if there is a disconnect between what is reported and what is going to the facilities. Dave responded that the recycling reports submitted by the counties do not include the method of recycling. He added that the material does have to be processed to count as recycling (e.g. mulch).
 - Dave suggested surveying all counties to see how organics are being recycled.
- Gary Felton added that poultry litter is going into a facility in Delaware.
- Doug Meyers asked where compost goes after it is made. He added that there have been concerns of persistent herbicides in the finished compost. He asked if there are safeguards in place for herbicide levels when compost is spread.
 - It was added that the Department of Agriculture requires registration of compost and other soil amendments that are distributed in Maryland.
 - It was noted that there are fewer restrictions for compost that is used on site.
 - Cradle to grave accountability was suggested.
 - Brenda Platt added that it was her understanding that MDA does not test for herbicides. Curling, stunted growth and germination problems should be looked for. It was noted that there were problems in Vermont at parts per billion levels. There are only a few labs that can test for persistent herbicides at those levels. Jane Thery added that composted horse manure had no problems.
 - Keith Ohlinger noted there is a form that needs to be signed by those providing feedstocks for composting to ensure certain products that could affect compost quality are not being used.
- Questions concerning the market for compost products were brought up again. Steve Birchfield added that compost is being distributed all over Maryland. MES facilities accept feedstock from multiple jurisdictions. Steve noted that the website for MES-produced compost is www.leafgro.com and the compost is being sold in PA, MD and VA.
- Roni Neff asked about public information for drop-off sites. She asked where she could bring yard trimmings for recycling in Baltimore City because she was told that the material it is taken to the landfill. Dave Mrgich stated that the city / county webpages typically list drop-off locations for various materials; links to each jurisdiction's website is listed on MDE's waste diversion website. It was noted that some landfills may also serve as drop-off or citizen convenience centers. It was also noted that only "separately collected" yard trimmings are prohibited from being disposed.

Food Scraps and Animal Manure

The following comments were made on the food scraps and animal manure infrastructure portion of the presentation.

- Patrick Serfass asked if food / beverage manufacturers' and slaughter facilities' waste was considered industrial waste.
 - Dave Mrgich explained that industrial waste is counted as commercial waste for the purpose of calculating the Maryland Recycling Act recycling rate as long as the waste goes to a public facility for disposal or recycling.
- Laura Noll noted that grade schools were not on the list of large food scrap generators.
 - Tariq Masood responded that grade schools are not considered major generators of food scraps. Laura added that they may not generate significant quantities of food scraps individually but collectively they could be considered a major generator.
- Patrick Serfass asked why the hospitality industry (e.g. hotels) was not included and stated that this seems like a major category.
- Peter Houstle added that there is a lot of interest in food scraps diversion among hotels, but it is constrained by health regulations.
- Patrick asked if the hospitality category can be captured on the large food scrap generator maps. MDE noted that we do not have the data but we can look for statistics.
- It was suggested to ask Melvin Thompson with the Restaurant Association of Maryland for data. Laura Abshire with the National Restaurant Association was also suggested as a contact to gather this data. It was noted that these are restaurant contacts but they might have information for hotels as well.
- Steven Birchfield wrote (via email): I was interested in seeing the food pantry free meal site points AND the composting facilities that accept food scraps as a feedstock on the same map. I think combining the data will beter show or represent where the current food waste/ or wasted food is going? It also may help show areas where ether type of infrastructure is most needed. I was also suggesting that public schools be considered as part of the LFSG group. It has been my experience that public schools can produce nearly 2 tons of food scraps per week per school. I base the school tonnage amount off of what DC public schools have hauled to us over the past 2 years. According to Maryland.gov there are 1447 schools in the state of Maryland as of 2015. You would be looking at 2894 potential tons per week if every school had a SSO or food scraps collection program. That's 104,184 potential tons over the 180 day school calendar year. It would make Maryland schools the second largest generator on the list. These schools could also play a major role in food donations if programs were put in place to make that food available for food pantries and free meal sites.
- Roni Neff suggested that there should be a standard definition of food scraps for the purpose of this study. Otherwise, the term "food scraps" may be interpreted to include only food that is wasted before it reaches the consumer. Others noted that sometimes more specific terms are used to distinguish food that is wasted at different points along the supply chain. For example, sometimes food loss is distinguished from food waste and sometimes pre-consumer food waste is distinguished from post-consumer food waste.
- Brenda Platt added that K-12 school food is prepared at a Gaithersburg food preparation center and noted that food waste data might be captured where the food is prepared.

- Doug Meyers suggested a mass balance exercise looking at where manure is produced and where it is going. He noted the Delmarva Land and Litter Challenge. Information can be found here: <https://delmarvalandandlitter.net/>
- Jane Thery mentioned the mushroom industry in Pennsylvania.
- Patrick Serfass asked about data for the amount of manure per animal. He added that information and statistics might be available through USDA Agricultural Research Service.
- Patrick Serfass noted that Figure 5 of the issue paper does not show the 11 wastewater treatment facilities that have digesters. He noted that these need discussion and should be considered as existing infrastructure with the potential to handle food scraps. He added that data for biogas facilities is available at www.biogasdata.org.
- It was noted that an existing digester at a Cecil County dairy may have suspended operations. Brenda Platt noted that on-site composting is not reflected on the maps, including composting at Frostburg University, Howard County's Jessup Detention Center, etc. She recommended that other small scale, decentralized operations are important and should be a part of the infrastructure discussion.
- Doug Meyers added that on-site facilities are often struggling to reach a certain threshold at which they can be economically viable. He asked where the product from these on-site facilities goes. He suggested adding value to existing facilities to make them successful.

Recommended Discussion Topics

Dave Mrgich provided a brief overview of the Waste Diversion Infrastructure Recommendations Discussion handout. The study group discussed potential recommendations for increasing infrastructure for organics diversion based on the information presented in the issue paper. The following comments were offered:

- Patrick Serfass suggested increasing AD capacity. He added that markets need to be identified for compost products and digestates and the availability of markets will help AD facilities come online.
- Peter Houstle added that we cannot increase capacity without a market for the product. Generators, processors, and markets are all needed to make organics diversion work.
 - Jane Thery seconded Peter's idea. She noted that Oregon and Washington have marketing programs for organic products.
- Brenda Platt added that Maryland's State Highway Administration (SHA) has specifications for compost and compost-based products and that a law requiring SHA to establish specifications for compost-related materials has been partially implemented.
- Brenda added that waste prevention should be a focus because if wastes are reduced there is no need for increased capacity and infrastructure.
 - Kaley noted that we need better data for infrastructure gaps regarding food donation. Brenda concurred.
 - Brenda added that we should build decentralized, small scale composting because it is always feasible. She noted, for example, that all schools could have small scale composting on site.
- Doug Meyers expressed concerns for the transportation costs of moving products that weigh a lot and suggested that on-site composting is best. He added that digestion reduces the weight of the material and the final product is much lighter.

- Peter Houstle mentioned marketing and education to help people be more aware of how to use food more efficiently. He noted that it costs more to manage wasted food at the back end versus manage the food efficiently at front end (before it is wasted).
- Roni Neff mentioned incentives for composting, like discounted bins, etc. and a place for entrepreneurs to get information.
- Patrick Serfass suggested that there should be more clarity on the permitting process for AD. He mentioned excess capacity available at wastewater treatment plants and added that data is available on the biogas website.
- Kaley Laleker suggested defining different components food scraps and defining which components are ideally managed through each type of recovery infrastructure (food banks, composting/AD facilities, etc.).
- Keith Ohlinger asked for help from the medical and environmental fields to examine and place in perspective potential health, safety, and other concerns regarding composting and mulching. He noted that perceived smells, truck traffic, etc. are holding up permitting facilities at the zoning and planning level.
- Gary Felton added that the costs to develop infrastructure are significant. He stated that the composting regulations are very stringent, and it costs 1 to 2 million to create a new AD site. The costs of infrastructure will be addressed in future meetings with Commerce and MEA.
- Mike Ensor noted that Ritchie Land Reclamation/Tolson is interested in mulching and composting. He noted the challenges include economic viability, sustainability of the end market, public perception and fear of investment.
- Keith Ohlinger stated that his farm had received bread donations as food for pigs and cattle. He spent 8 hours un-wrapping the food. He stated that he receives offers for canned food frequently but does not have the time or staff to open all of the cans. He also added that the food needs to be free from contaminants in order to feed the animals.

Public Comments

Dave Mrgich opened the discussion to non-Study group members.

- Susan Wexler mentioned improving food donation. She noted that seasonal produce surplus can be quickly made into applesauce or tomato sauce but there is a lack of refrigerator and freezer capacity.
- Lori Finafrock added that compost is tested regularly for persistent herbicides at the Reichs Ford Road Landfill.
- Mary (last name unknown, via telephone) mentioned MDA's regulations on spreading compost on lawns. It was added that Maryland's restrictions on past date fluid milk are strict compared to other states.

Summary/Conclusion

- Dave Mrgich concluded the meeting by noting that study group members and interested parties should check the website for additional details and meeting information. He also noted that the interim report for the study is due in July and that the next meetings are tentatively scheduled.
- Peter Houstle asked for more descriptive map titles on the webpage.

- Brenda Platt asked if there were any named members not participating. Dave responded that he has not heard from 5 or 6 groups and that will be noted in the report.