

Composting Resources for Local Governments

The number of local food collection and composting programs has grown rapidly throughout the U.S. in the past 5 years.¹ The experiences of these programs provide valuable information that can be used by Maryland's counties and municipalities in planning and implementing new food scrap programs. Because food constitutes an estimated 14.5% of the waste stream and is one of the last materials with room for large gains in recycling, capturing food scraps will likely be an important part of counties' efforts to meet their recycling goals in the future.

10 Things Local Governments Can do to Increase Organics Diversion

1. Consider collecting food scraps and soiled paper along with existing yard trim collection, or expand yard trim collection programs.
2. Consider adding food to existing yard trim composting sites, or consider establishing a new composting site if one does not exist.
3. Provide instruction, bins, or demonstration sites for residents on home composting.
4. Conduct a review of local ordinances and regulations, including zoning, solid waste, and building codes, to ensure they encourage rather than hinder environmentally responsible collection and composting of organics. Consider revisiting any local restrictions on home composting.
5. Launch a composting outreach campaign, drawing on campaigns that have succeeded elsewhere, to stress the benefits of composting to residents.
6. Partner with the food bank or local hunger relief agencies serving your jurisdiction to host events, drives, and outreach programs on donation of edible surplus food. Contact large generators of edible surplus directly and offer to connect them with food banks.
7. If your jurisdiction includes farming communities, work with the local farm bureau or soil conservation district. Host informational sessions for farmers about surplus or unmarketable crop donation programs. Provide information, demonstrations, or site visits to showcase on-farm composting. Coordinate contacts among farmers seeking to establish cost-effective organics collection routes.
8. Provide tips to residents on preventing food waste through a consumer-directed education program similar to the "Love Food, Hate Waste" campaign in the U.K. or the "Food: Too Good to Waste" pilot in the U.S. (see below).
9. Use compost on land managed by local government agencies.

¹ Yepson, Rhodes, "Residential Food Waste Collection in the U.S." BioCycle Vol 53 No. 1 p. 23 (2012)

<http://www.biocycle.net/2012/01/residential-food-waste-collection-in-the-u-s/>

10. Collect and compost yard trim and other organics generated by local government operations and facilities. Train staff to properly separate organic materials. Promote the local government program as an example to other institutional generators.

The following resources provide ideas, guidance, and case studies to assist in implementing many of the above actions.

Developing a New Collection Program

Best Management Practices in Food Scraps Programs: This [paper](#), prepared for EPA Region 5, analyzes various characteristics of existing food scraps collections programs and assesses the impact of different characteristics on program success. Based on this information, it lists specific best management practices and case studies for food scraps programs. Freeman, Juri & Lisa A. Skumatz, Ph.D. *Best Management Practices in Food Scraps Programs* (Prepared for U.S. EPA Region 5). Related information can be found on the Econservation Institute's Food Scraps and Organics Recovery [website](#).

Cambridge, Massachusetts Commercial Collection: While most studies and resources address local programs for residential food scraps, Cambridge serves as an example of a local government program on the East Coast that offers voluntary collection of organics to businesses. The Commercial Compost Collection [website](#) details the program and contains outreach and training materials used by the town.

Georgia Department of Community Affairs and Georgia Recycling Coalition, Source-Separated Organics Recycling Toolkit. This toolkit was created with funding from EPA and consists of a guide for local governments and an Excel-based spreadsheet. The guide contains resources for local governments to implement residential source-separated organics collection programs, including a model request for proposals (RFP), fact sheets, reporting documents, and information on collection vehicles and containers. The spreadsheet estimates environmental and economic impacts of an organics collection program based on information about the community and the proposed program. Two versions are available for curbside and dropoff programs. The toolkit can be accessed at the Department of Community Affairs website [here](#) (scroll down to Source-Separated Organics Recycling Toolkit).

Other information on organics hauling.

- Sustainable Materials Management Webinar - How to Negotiate Your Contract with Waste Haulers. [This past webinar](#) from 2012 discusses general issues in negotiating and renegotiating waste, recycling, or organics contracts in order to increase diversion.
- South Bayside Waste Management Authority (serving San Mateo County, CA) issued [an RFP](#) in 2008 for waste, recycling, and organics collection services. The website provides an example of an RFP process and contract for a collection services that includes organics. A number of other RFPs including organics collection and/or organics processing are available

online and may serve as examples (simply search for “organics processing RFP” or “organics collection RFP”).

Sample Outreach Materials

The following materials were created by local governments and other organizations throughout the country to educate the public on organics collection programs, home composting, and food waste reduction. Maryland counties can use these examples as starting points or in developing their own outreach campaigns.

San Francisco, California has a three-bin collection system for trash, recyclables, and compostables. Recycling and composting has been mandatory for individuals and businesses, including at special events, since 2009.

- [Television advertisement](#)
- [Bin labels](#)
- [Business composting fliers, signs, and guidance](#)
- [Mandatory recycling and composting fact sheet](#) (also available in Spanish and Chinese)
- [Mandatory recycling and composting ordinance](#)
- [Biocycle article](#) about food collection outreach efforts. BioCycle March 2009, Vol. 50, No. 3, p. 18, “Food Waste Diversion Promoted on the Street.”
- [San Francisco Environment article](#) describing the City’s enforcement approach to mandatory recycling and composting.

Seattle, Washington’s residential utility customers must sign up for separate food and yard waste collection unless they qualify for a home composting exemption. Owners of multifamily buildings with 5 or more units must also provide for collection of food and yard trim.

- [Kitchen scrap storage tips](#)
- [“Where Does it Go?” Flyer](#) (available in 15 languages)
- [“Where Does it Go?” Recycling game](#)
- Multilingual [videos](#) showing which materials go in which bins
- Apartment owners [toolkit request form](#) (allows apartment owners to order laminated posters, flyers, brochures, DVDs, or request on-site training)
- Properties with 5 or more units can join the [Friends of Recycling and Composting Program](#) by signing a pledge to take certain actions to increase recycling and compostables collection. Participating property owners receive a \$100 credit to their utility bills, training, and free kitchen pails for their residents.

Austin, Texas’s Organics Collection Pilot began in December 2012 and serves 7,900 households.

- [Information about the pilot](#)
- [How-to Guide](#), including instructions for making a compostable can liner, tips on odor prevention, a list of acceptable and non-acceptable items, and FAQs about the pilot.
- A separate [home composting program](#) challenges residents to downsize their trash bins, take a composting class, and purchase a composting bin in exchange for a rebate up to \$75 on the composting system.

Howard County, Maryland has a food and yard trim collection and composting pilot, the first of its kind in Maryland.

- The County’s [food scraps website](#) provides additional information on the program. Outreach materials include a flyer on accepted materials and FAQs and a slide show of photos showing the right and wrong way to participate in food and yard trim collection.

Washington Department of Ecology provides a fact sheet entitled “Why Compost?,” available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Natural Resources Defense Council produced [this fact sheet](#), called “Food Facts,” which explains the issue of consumer food waste and provides tips for source reduction.

The “Food: Too Good To Waste” Pilot was funded by EPA Region 10 and seeks to prevent consumer food waste through a targeted outreach campaign based on principles of community-based social marketing. The pilot materials are designed for implementation by local governments and are currently available on EPA’s FTP site. Resources include logos, shopping list templates, measurement tools, posters, guides, and messaging that can be promoted by governments. A write-up of the marketing research that went into developing the pilot is also available.

- The first two files on the FTP explain the outreach materials that are available on the [FTP site](#) and how to implement the program.
- For an example of a local government that has adopted the pilot, see King County, Washington’s [Too Good To Waste website](#).

International Compost Awareness Week: U.S. Composting Council hosts this annual composting publicity and education event during the first full week of May. The Council’s [website](#) provides a manual with ideas and tips on promoting the week, a sample proclamation, and other educational resources. The Council also holds an annual composting-themed poster contest with winning posters available for purchase.

Other Resources for Local Governments

Adding food to county composting sites. Counties or municipalities considering accepting food scraps at their own composting sites should review the following best management practices developed

by the U.S. Composting Council: USCC, [Best Management Practices for Incorporating Food Residuals Into Existing Yard Waste Composting Operations](#) Prepared for EPA Region 3 (2009)

Assessing options for food scrap recycling. This EPA guide is designed to provide local government officials with information needed to determine the best option for management of food scraps. The three potential options considered are: windrow composting; in-vessel composting; and anaerobic digestion. U.S. EPA, [Food Scrap Recycling: A Primer for Understanding Large-Scale Food Scrap Recycling Technologies for Urban Areas](#) (2012).

Creating incentives through the zoning code. In addition to State regulations, composting facilities and community gardens are subject to local zoning and land use restrictions. Ohio EPA has created guidance for local governments to ensure that zoning codes accommodate and encourage composting and urban agriculture activities. Ohio EPA, [Urban Agriculture, Composting and Zoning](#) (2012).

CalRecycle Comprehensive Compost Odor Response Project Report: CalRecycle has undertaken extensive research on the types, sources, and solutions of odor from composting facilities. The 2007 [Report](#) lists a science-based “menu” of mitigation strategies and can be useful for counties designing and troubleshooting their own operations, as well as for interacting with private composting facilities in their communities.

EPA’s Sustainable Food Management [webinar series](#) can help local governments stay up-to-date on new and successful food scraps diversion programs, both in the public and private sectors. A related series called [Sustainable Materials Web Academy](#) is geared specifically to State and local governments, and includes topics on organics as well as other recyclables.

EPA’s websites on [Food Waste](#) and [Composting Publications](#) provide general information and further reading on composting.

Composting at Work Guide: This [guide](#) was created by the Chittenden Solid Waste District in Vermont but is applicable or adaptable to workplaces in Maryland. It may be useful in beginning a composting program at local agency facilities. It contains practical tips on how to get started and address challenges such as staff training and odor prevention.

Compost Use

Local governments have an opportunity to support the composting market in Maryland by using compost on county-managed lands and encouraging its use by others within the jurisdiction.

- U.S. Composting Council’s [Compost Locator Map](#), [Biocycle’s Find-a-Composter](#), or [Mid-Atlantic Composting Directory](#) can assist in identifying sources of compost.

- A 2011 report prepared for CalRecycle examines several potential uses of compost and BMPs for protecting water quality that relate to compost use and production. Crohn, David, University of California, Riverside, [*Compost Best Management Practices and Benefits*](#) (Prepared for CalRecycle) (2011).
- U.S. Composting Council's [Field Guide to Compost Use](#) is an extensive guide detailing various uses for compost and describes the characteristics of compost suited for each. It also contains steps for each use and general information about how to apply compost.
- A paper by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance summarizes benefits and uses of compost for protection of watersheds, along with case studies. Bell, Bobby & Brenda Platt, ILSR, [*Building Healthy Soils With Compost to Protect Watersheds*](#) (2013).
- CalRecycle provides [this website](#) on developing procurement specifications for compost and mulch.