

Report Focuses on Restaurant Composting

The Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University recently published a report for the National Restaurant Association (NRA) and the U.S. Composting Council (USCC) that studies the current state of food waste composting by restaurants. The purpose of the study was to identify the main barriers to restaurant composting and what policies could be pursued to overcome these barriers and increase food waste diversion in the United States.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 35 million tons of food scraps were generated in 2010.¹ The Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), a sustainable business consultancy, estimates that commercial full service and quick service restaurants generate approximately 11 million tons, or about one-third of total US food waste. Diverting food waste generated by US restaurants offers significant opportunity to reduce municipal solid waste disposed in landfills.

In 2011, the NRA surveyed its members to learn the current state of recycling in restaurants. The survey found that just 13 percent of restaurants nationwide participate in a composting program. Restaurants in the Northeast were most likely to compost (20%); those in the South (12%) and Midwest (9%) were least likely to compost. Independent restaurants (15%) were more likely to have a composting program in their restaurant than franchisee/chain restaurants (8%).²

The barriers to increased food waste collection and composting by restaurants were found to include

- Cost
- Access to composting services
- Lack of awareness, and
- Policy environment.

¹EPA, Municipal Solid Waste Generation, 2010

² NRA, Recycling for all the Right Returns, 2011

Composting usually represents additional cost to restaurants. Separating food and paper waste from trash and recyclable materials requires interior bins and signage not provided by the hauler. Restaurants will pay for compost hauling in addition to trash hauling in cases where trash hauling fees are included in the restaurants' lease. In these cases the restaurant will not benefit from decreased trash hauling fees attributable to decreased trash volume.

Additional staff training and an ongoing education program also increase costs. Expanding food separation to the "front-of-the-house" requires additional investment in equipment and signage, and staff time making sure customers comply with the program.

Restaurants cited access to affordable compost hauling services as a barrier to food waste diversion. A single restaurant may not generate a sufficient quantity of food waste on a daily basis to warrant hauler pickup. Restaurants can overcome this by pooling their waste in a shared pickup bin; however, this strategy is not available to restaurants in less densely developed areas.

Public misperceptions create psychological barriers for restaurant customers and staff. Customers may perceive composting as unsanitary and "yucky". Staff may see food waste separation as an additional burden.

Policy changes can impact access to the necessary composting infrastructure. Yard waste disposal bans stimulated the compost industry's growth, and repeal of these bans threatens the availability of compost processing. Low landfill disposal fees make it uneconomical for restaurants to divert food waste to compost facilities.

The Sanford School report recommends a nationwide, market-driven restaurant composting program to address these barriers. The program will include (continued on page 3)

Legislative Update

While landfill disposal bans are under pressure in other parts of the country, **Vermont** has passed a law that bans the disposal of yard and wood waste after July 1, 2016. A food waste ban takes effect on July 1, 2020. It is estimated that food waste makes up a third of Vermont's waste stream. Vermont will provide grant funding to support the continued development of organic waste processing facilities in the state.

Massachusetts may be joining Vermont in the near future. This New England state has adopted a new Organics Action Plan intended to divert at least 35% of food waste from disposal by 2020. The plan includes technical and financial support for generators and processors, efforts to expand the market for compost, and regulatory reform. The plan recommends a ban on the disposal of commercially generated organic materials to be effective July 1, 2014.

Food Waste Programs Growing in Southeast

Food waste composting is heating up in the Southeastern U.S. Mecklenburg County, NC (Mecklenburg) and Charleston County, SC (Charleston), both leaders in sustainable solid waste management, are in the process of developing and/or implementing food waste recovery programs.

Mecklenburg's Solid Waste Master Plan of 2009 set a waste reduction goal of 35% by 2018; food waste recovery was identified as a potential path to achieving that goal. Mecklenburg commissioned a food waste diversion study for commercial and residential generators as a first step toward developing and implementing a food waste recovery program.

Kessler Consulting, Inc. (KCI) conducted the study, which included email and telephone surveys. (continued on page 3)

Florida Compost Facility Earns Certified Biobased Label



C&C Peat Company, located in Okahumpka, Florida has earned the USDA Certified Biobased Product Label for its Regular AA Compost. The USDA Certified Biobased Product Label verifies that the product's amount of renewable biobased ingredients meets or exceeds the prescribed USDA standards. Biobased products are goods composed in whole or in significant part of agricultural, forestry, or marine materials. Ongoing lab testing and monitoring by the USDA assures the label standards are maintained.



C&C Peat Composting Facility

C&C Peat's Class AA compost is a premium compost sold in Florida. The chief feedstock is horse bedding generated by thoroughbred racing stables located in central Florida. The shavings are typically Pine.

The Okahumpka facility can process 150,000 cubic yards of shavings per year. The complete process takes 120 days. For more information visit www.biopreferred.gov.

Report Focuses on Restaurant Composting (continued from page 1)

features that promote awareness of composting, minimize composting costs for restaurants, improve restaurant access to compost facilities, and create a favorable regulatory environment.

The program will include educating politicians on the benefits of aggressive waste diversion goals and municipal composting in order to pass pro-composting regulations. These include high waste diversion goals, higher landfill disposal fees, and eased permit requirements for compost facilities.

Restaurants are encouraged to partner with local major food waste generators such as grocers, universities, or hospitals that may already have food waste composting programs.

The NRA is encouraged to develop a composting education program for restaurants that will include a "getting started" kit, FAQ, seasonal trainings and webinars, and social media outlets for best-practices sharing.

The report recommends that the program include a waste audit initiative to bring together restaurants and composting facilities. The audits would quantify the food waste, review source separation practices, and assess waste diversion, disposal needs, and hauling expenses to minimize costs for the restaurant.

The NRA and USCC are encouraged to develop an awards program for member restaurants that participate in the composting initiative. Incentives might include members-only access to free industry reports, webinars and admission to NRA trade shows.

The Sanford report recommends the program be implemented in three phases spanning the next five years.

For additional information regarding the NRA's recycling and food waste diversion programs, go to <http://www.restaurant.org/sustainability/restaurantsrecycle/>.

Food Waste Programs Growing in Southeast (continued from page 2)

The diversion study found that the top 300 businesses in the six largest food generating sectors generate 35% of total food waste, and there is an unmet need for commercial food waste recovery as well as a willingness to consider food waste recovery options. Sufficient processing capacity exists in the county to support a commercial or residential pilot program.

Mecklenburg's next steps include a pilot food recovery program for the Charlotte Mecklenburg School System. The County is also having discussions with a local company that is interested in operating a commercial food waste recovery facility in or near the region.

In Charleston, composting food waste already supports the County Council's 40% recycling goal. In September 2010, with technical assistance from KCI, Charleston began the first approved food waste composting pilot demonstration in the state. During the year long pilot, 1,859 tons of food waste were processed under the program.

The pilot's success led to a composting registration modification granted by DHEC³ to make the program permanent. Charleston rolled out the permanent Commercial Food Waste Recovery Program in October 2011. The program accepts both pre and post consumer food waste.

The program's education and outreach efforts include information and resources on the county website, as well as technical assistance provided by waste assessors during on-site visits. The assessors offer guidance on designing a program that fits the business' needs and helps to find solutions to logistical problems such as container size and location.

Local haulers are partnering with the county to meet local commercial demand for food waste collection. Participation has more than doubled since May, when an active marketing campaign was launched.

³Department of Health and Environmental Control

USCC Annual Conference & Tradeshow Coming to Florida!

We are fortunate that the USCC 2013 Annual Conference & Tradeshow will be held in nearby Orlando, Florida on January 28 - 31. This is a great opportunity for anyone interested in composting to learn about the latest issues, techniques, and equipment, while networking with the leading authorities on composting today. This year's theme is *The Magic of Composting*.

The educational program includes the *USCC Foundations of Composting* full day course on January 28. Workshop topics include:

- Composting Business Management
- Odor Control & Process Management
- Compost Marketers Toolkit
- Compost Use in Agriculture, Horticulture and Landscaping
- Vermicomposting Food Residuals at Restaurants, Businesses, and Institutions
- Developing a Composting Program at a Restaurant or Grocery
- Organics Collection Training for Special Event Coordinators: Planning & Implementation

Tour options will include

- Three Very Different Composting Operations or
- Disney World facilities including the Resort Nursery & Tree Farm.

Learn more about these and additional educational offerings at

<http://compostingcouncil.org/workshops/>.

Informative technical sessions will continue January 29 and 30 and run concurrent with The Trade Show. January 31 will be filled with demonstrations of over two dozen pieces of state-of-the-art equipment in action.

Florida speakers will include:

- Bill Townshend, South Dade Soil and Water Conservation District
- David Hill, CycleLogic
- Keith A. Howard, Lee County Solid Waste Division
- Monica Ozores-Hampton, University of Florida/Southwest Florida Research and Education Center
- Miriam Zimms, Kessler Consulting, Inc.
- Mitch Kessler, Kessler Consulting, Inc.

Upcoming Events

SE Food Waste Reduction Conference, November 12 -13, 2012

Hilton University Place, Charlotte, NC

<http://www.cra-recycle.org/foodwasteconference/>

USGBC Greenbuild, Nov. 14-16, 2012

San Francisco, California

<http://www.greenbuildexpo.org/Home.aspx>

Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition, January 23—25, 2013

Ft Lauderdale Convention Center

<http://www.fngla.org/TPIE/index.aspx>

USCC Conference & Tradeshow, January 28-31, 2013
Orlando, Florida

<https://www.cvent.com/events/u-s-composting-council-s-21st-annual-conference-and-tradeshow/registration-802e694f8bbf45b2b22f946abde7558b.aspx>

Southeast Recycling Conference & Trade Show,
March 10—13, 2013

Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, FL

<http://www.southeastrecycling.com/>

Biocycle West Coast Conference, April 8—10, 2013
San Diego, CA

<http://www.biocycle.net/conferences/west-coast-2012/>

42nd Annual Environmental Show of the South,
April 24—26, 2013

See FORCE website for additional information

Florida Native Plant Society 2013 Conference, May
16—19, 2013

University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL

<http://www.fnps.org/conference/2013>

Waste Expo 2013, May 20—23, 2013

Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, New Orleans, LA

<http://www.wasteexpo.com/wasteexpo2013/Public/Content.aspx?ID=1040276&sortMenu=102001>

For more information about organics recycling in Florida, please call Kessler Consulting

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