

Composting Resources for Businesses

Businesses such as food manufacturers, supermarkets, and restaurants are important generators of organics, particularly food and non-recyclable paper. Massachusetts has estimated that food manufacturers generate the largest portion (58%) of commercial and institutional food scraps in that State.¹ Restaurants and supermarkets were next, accounting for 17% and 11%, respectively. California states that in 2005, over 63% of all restaurant waste disposed was food.² Implementing an organics collection program for composting or food donation can significantly reduce the overall waste stream of these businesses, yielding environmental and economic benefits.

Benefits of Commercial Organics Diversion

By source reduction, food donation, and composting programs, businesses have the opportunity to:

- Reduce costs from purchasing surplus food;
- Reduce costs of waste disposal;
- Decrease greenhouse gas emissions;
- Feed hungry people in their communities; and
- Demonstrate to their customers that they are environmentally responsible.

The following resources can help businesses in planning and implementing organics diversion programs:

[U.S. EPA's Food Waste Assessment Tools](#) The tools include a cost calculator, which allows businesses and institutions to determine the costs of alternative methods of managing food scraps. It also provides an analysis of the environmental benefits of composting, source reduction, and food donation scenarios and includes links to additional resources. A food waste log allows businesses to document food losses over time and determine the sources of waste.

[U.S. EPA Sustainable Food Management Webinars](#): This free webinar series provides guidance and case studies on topics in sustainable food scraps management, aimed at institutions, venues, and businesses (especially supermarkets). Presentations and audio from past webinars are available.

[U.S. EPA's Food Recovery Challenge](#) helps businesses and institutions set measurable goals for diversion of food scraps and track their progress. Participants in this free program gain access to an

¹ Massachusetts DEP, Summary Analysis of Massachusetts Commercial/Institutional Food Waste Generation Data (2011) <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/recycle/priorities/foodsum.pdf>

² California Integrated Waste Management Board, Waste Disposal and Diversion Findings for Selected Industry Groups (2006) <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/Publications/Documents/Disposal/34106006.pdf>

online data management and tracking system as well as technical assistance, and may be recognized as a “success story” for their efforts.

[U.S. EPA, Putting Surplus Food to Good Use:](#) This EPA brochure aimed at food service providers explains the benefits of recovering food scraps and lists steps and case studies for starting a recovery program.

[Supermarket Composting Handbook and Resources:](#) Massachusetts DEP and U.S. EPA collaborated on this handbook to assist supermarkets in starting new composting programs. Topics include planning a collection system, training staff, and tracking progress. The accompanying resources consist of sample contracts, signs, training exercises, sample announcements, and a sample audit form.

[Center for EcoTechnology, Composting in Restaurants and Schools:](#) This toolkit provides simple step-by-step instructions for planning and implementing a composting program at a restaurant or a school, complete with the estimated time needed to carry out each step. Case studies are also provided.

[National Restaurant Association’s Conserve Educational Program:](#) This free program provides online access to best management practices and how-to videos and allows restaurants to create individualized sustainability plans. For each best practice, the program provides an estimated return on investment and users can track their implementation of best practices. The program covers all aspects of the sustainable operation of restaurants, including waste diversion.

[U.S. EPA’s WARM Model](#) allows any entity that controls the management of waste to assess the greenhouse gas impacts of a particular waste management scenario relative to a baseline. The Model is available as an Excel spreadsheet and allows the user to input material types, tonnages, and the method of management (source reduction, landfilling, combustion, recycling, or composting). Greenhouse gas emissions reductions and energy usage are calculated.

[USDA’s U.S. Food Waste Challenge](#) was announced in June 2013 and seeks to engage all participants in the food market in addressing food waste. Participants post a list of activities that they will do to reduce and recycle food scraps. The current list of participants includes trade associations, large corporations, and government agencies. In addition to goal-setting and demonstrating a commitment to food waste diversion, the program provides examples of strategies other organizations are adopting (click on each partner’s name to see its plan).

[Biodegradable Product Institute Listing of Certified Biodegradable Food Service Items.](#) BPI issues standards for biodegradable products and oversees use of the “certified compostable” label. Food service businesses may wish to switch to compostable service ware or compostable bags when they implement new composting programs. (**NOTE:** Check with your composter before selecting food service items as not all biodegradable items are accepted by all composters).

[Biocycle’s “Find-a-Composter”](#) or [USCC’s Compost Locator Map](#) can help identify the closest composting facilities that may be able to accept commercial materials.

[The Feeding America website](#) for Maryland has contact information for Maryland’s two major food banks. Note that smaller hunger relief agencies also exist throughout Maryland.

[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 contains practical tips on how to get started and addresses challenges such as staff training and odor prevention.

[Best Practices & Emerging Solutions Toolkit](#): This resource, provided by the Food Waste Reduction Alliance, provides information and tips on reducing food waste from food-related businesses, with a particular focus on pre-consumer food waste.

Off-Site Composting. Businesses that choose to send organics off site for composting will need to contract with a hauler to remove compostables and transport them to a composting facility. Be sure to discuss the following issues with your potential organics hauler:

- Are there any types of organics that are not accepted? Ask specifically about meat, paper towels and other non-recyclable paper, and yard trim (if generated).
- What are the logistics of the collection system? Is material collected at a set interval or on call? How and where should the material be set out for collection? Does the hauler provide any bins, signage, or training that the business can use?
- Where does the material go for composting?
- What kinds of compostable products are accepted, if any? This is important because some composting facilities accept certain compostable plastic food service ware and compostable plastic bags, while others do not.

Before setting up an organics collection program, it may be useful to determine how much of your waste is food scraps. [RecyclingWorks Massachusetts](#) lists some methods of estimating the quantity of food scraps generated from various types of businesses.

On-Site Options. Many businesses will need to send organics off site for composting, either because they lack the space or staff to compost materials on-site or because they have no use for the finished compost. However, in-vessel composting systems are available that require less labor and a much smaller footprint and these may be a good option for certain businesses.

Examples of Business Organics Diversion Programs: The following resources provide an idea of the types of businesses that have implemented organics diversion programs how they have been successful.

- [Whole Foods Presentation](#) on its composting efforts from the 2012 U.S. Composting Council Conference.

- SMM Webinar – [Grocers and the EPA Food Recovery Challenge](#): this past webinar details food recovery successes of several supermarkets (transcript, presentations, and video available).
- SMM webinar - [Food Donation: A "How-To" for Food Retailers and the Food Service Industry](#): A past webinar by food donation organizations that work with businesses (presentations available).
- EPA Region 3’s [Composting and Food Waste Management website](#) has links and presentations from past workshops and other events. This includes information on donation and/or composting programs of BJ’s Wholesale Club, Inc., Martin’s Food Markets, Food Lion, and a hotel.