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Scaling up Composting in the Charlotte Region

Food Recovery Summit | Nov. 18th, 2015 | Charleston, South Carolina
GreenBlue is a non-profit dedicated to researching and promoting the principles of sustainable materials management.

- **Use Wisely**
- **Eliminate Toxicity**
- **Recover More**
GreenBlue’s Sustainable Packaging Coalition

• Membership group that brings together hundreds of companies & stakeholders

• Working *together* to broaden the understanding of packaging sustainability, develop meaningful improvements

• Currently over 150 members
Project goals

1. To promote food waste and compostable packaging recycling in the Charlotte area
2. To generate lessons learned and fundamental guidance to stimulate much broader and more extensive organics and packaging composting programs nationwide
Partners

- U.S. EPA Region 4 (grant funding)
- North Carolina Dept. of Environment & Natural Resources
- Mecklenburg County Solid Waste
- The Infrastructure, Design, Environment and Sustainability Center (IDEAS) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC)
- Elemental Impact (Ei) – Non-profit
- Earth Farms Organics – Composter
Goal 1 - **Approach**

Provide assistance for commercial generators to initiate or expand F&PW diversion programs.

1. **Recruit**: communicate, educate, convince

2. **Provide funding for**:
   - Start-up & logistical support
   - Training and education / technical assistance
   - 1-3 months of collection

3. **Track metrics**
   - Tonnage
   - Awareness and attitudes through surveys
Goal 1 - Accomplishments

• Team contacted over 90 F&PW generators
• Gained 13 participants + county schools:
  • Diverted 353 tons of material (through Sept. 2015)
  • Developed SMM / composting lesson plan
• Composter growth and viability:
  • Added a scale to their collection vehicle to be able to report back to their customers the quantity of organic waste over time
  • Increased collection by 9%
Participants

IKEA
Bank of America Stadium
CMS
Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy
Central Piedmont Community College
Food Lion
Carolina Place
Mecklenburg County Sheriff
YMCA of Greater Charlotte
Friendship Trays
Not Just Coffee
300 East Restaurant
Pure Pizza
South End Hops Festival
Goal 2 - Lessons learned & best practices

- Waste management practices matter
- Data matters
- Contamination matters
- Education matters
Waste management practices

Economics and contract specifics play a large role in the viability of F&PW recycling.
Waste management best practices

• Ensure a per ton cost vs. a “pull” cost.
• Ensure transparency regarding ownership and final disposition of waste in contracts.
Data matters:
Waste characterization results

F&PW averaged 6 lbs/gal.

Contamination represented 0.3% (by weight) of F&PW.

Compostable non-food items including packaging (CNF) represented 5.1% (by weight) of F&PW.
Data matters: **Best practices**

1. Perform a waste audit as a guide to:
   - Determine the quantity and type of waste generated
   - Identify potential areas for waste reduction
   - Identify opportunities for reuse, recycling, and composting materials
   - Evaluate costs and potential savings for diversion
   - Set goals to improve recycling and composting activities.

2. Require contractors / waste haulers to provide tonnage data on all waste streams.
Contamination matters

While 79% of respondents say they “correctly dispose of all waste,” the most common reason for contamination by respondents was confusion (14%).
Contamination matters: **Best practices**
Education matters

- Recruitment was very difficult
- Companies want to be more sustainable
Education Matters: Best practices for why, how & what

- Communications to public
- Identify resources and supporters
- Connect with schools
- Use signage, handouts, and videos
Education Matters: Best practices why, how, and what
Compostable packaging

It is critical to include compostable packaging in the emerging organics recovery infrastructure

• 29% of participants said they use compostable packaging, **82%** that using compostable packaging is beneficial.

• Use of compostable utensils, cups, lids, and straws would have reduced number of contaminants by 27%. 
Policies and incentives

- Not a primary focus of this project
- Extremely important for the development of needed infrastructure
- Recommendations for localities are detailed in EPA’s Managing and Transforming Waste Streams tool
Next steps

• Develop a Road Map / Expand EPA Tool(s) to include Best Practices for All Sectors
• How2Compost Label
Thank you!

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