Growing Community and Food with Community Composting

Brenda Platt
Director, Composting for Community Project
Institute for Local Self-Reliance
November 18th, 2015
Food Recovery Summit
Charleston, South Carolina
Composting can take place effectively in a wide range of scale and sizes. Communities embracing a decentralized and diverse organics recovery infrastructure will be more resilient and better reap the economic and environmental benefits that organics recovery has to offer.
500 ton-per-day Regional Peninsula Compost Facility Closed

Failure of the Wilmington Compost Facility Underscores Need for a Locally Based and Diverse Composting Infrastructure

Neil Seldman | 0 Comments | Dec 18, 2014

The rapid increase in community-scale composting in the Mid-Atlantic is sorely needed. The recent closing of the Wilmington Organics Recycling Center in Delaware, due to the loss of its operating permit, has pushed the need for a distributed and diverse composting infrastructure to the forefront. Source separated food discard piles in Washington, DC, are now scarce.

The Wilmington Organics Recycling Center, permitted, financed and built by The Peninsula Compost Group (TPCG), the facility source separated organic materials from government institutions, grocery chains, restaurants, and other large food waste generators. A separate company, named to be set up to own the plant. Its original members included the EDIS Company and Great Delaware, as well as the developers, TPCG. The facility commenced operations in 2007. For the first two years, TPCG was the managing and operations partner. During complaints or Notices of Violation from the State of Delaware and the compost project permit for unrestricted use.

However, the anticipated ramp-up to 600 tons per day of incoming food waste did not strain the facility. In 2011, Waste Management Inc. (WMI) approached PCC seeking a project and to provide food and wood waste to fill the facility’s capacity. This overt took the welcome given WMI’s interest in accelerating organics recycling services and develop.

NEWS FROM THE DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

Contact: Melanie Rapp, DNREC Public Affairs, 302-739-0002

DNREC Secretary orders closure of Peninsula Compost facility in Wilmington

DOVER (Oct. 22, 2014) -- DNREC Secretary David Small has issued a Secretary’s Order to Peninsula Compost Company LLC of Wilmington requiring closure of the recycling facility. The Order, signed Oct. 22, directs the company immediately cease accepting any material at the facility and initiate steps to implement an orderly closure in compliance with a closure plan, the Closing Approval for Closure Activities (attached to the Secretary’s Order).

In addition to immediately ceasing accepting any waste into the facility, the Order requires all active composting of existing material onsite to be completed by Jan. 18, 2015. All compost and related waste must be removed from the facility by March 31, 2015.

“Peninsula Compost Company has placed an undue burden on the quality of life of residents in the City of Wilmington, part of the City of New Castle and part of New Castle County — particularly those living in close proximity to the facility due to frequent uncontrolled odors,” said Secretary Small. “The company has been unable to maintain compliance with DNREC’s Beneficial Use Determination permit.

The Peninsula Compost Company began operating the Wilmington Organic Recycling Center in December 2000 with approval from DNREC via a Beneficial Use Determination (BUD) permit. The BUD allowed the company to accept and process household waste, food waste, yard waste, wood waste, and animal bedding, in order to produce and market quality compost products at its facility on Christian Avenue in Wilmington. The company was processing about 115,000 tons of waste per year.

Since operations began at the facility, DNREC has coordinated with Peninsula Compost Company to improve operations and compliance. However, over time, the company has been unable to maintain compliance and minimize odors. Some of the issues at the facility related to violations and odors include:

- Equipment has been non-operational, sometimes for extended periods of time.
- Time needed to produce finished compost takes longer than originally planned.
- Waste in the digester compartment have been stored onsite above approved quantities.
- Non-compostable residue from the screening process and trash have been stored onsite above approved quantities.
- Trench drains and wear of the paved composting pad have allowed for standing lake-like water.
- Poor maintenance of stormwater ponds and detention systems.
- Gore® Cover composting system has not been maintained appropriately.
- The mixture of food waste with yard waste/wood waste has meant at a ratio that is too high.
- Harvesting and composting windows have been contaminated with non-compostable wastes.

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ILSR INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL SELF-RELIANCE
Composting, lots of ways
“...decentralized composting processes can reduce the carbon footprint of collection and transportation while consuming organics in more localized situations that do not require large organized collection programs.”

“The Department recognizes that, in addition to helping the City achieve its Zero Waste goals, composting also addresses the community’s interest in enriching the region’s soil, strengthening sustainable food production and completing the food cycle.”

The Austin Resource Recovery Master Plan (December 2011), pp. 105-106.
Compost Peddlars (Austin)
Compost Peddlars (Austin)
Compost Peddlars (Austin)
WE USE FOOD SCRAPS TO BUILD URBAN ECOSYSTEMS

HOMES & BUSINESSES PRODUCE ORGANICS, AND WE CONNECT THEM TO NEARBY FARMS & GARDENS.

LOCAL CHEFS BUY FRESH PRODUCE DIRECT FROM THE FARM, AND WE HELP THEM SEND ORGANICS DIRECT TO THE FARM.

FARMS & GARDENS PROCESS ORGANICS INTO COMPOST TO GROW FOOD.

BECAUSE DISTANCES ARE SO SHORT, THE CARGO BIKE IS IDEALLY SUITED FOR THIS TASK.
Compost Peddlers (Austin)

Grassroots campaign to move 1M pounds of waste by bike in 2016. Help change the face of waste!

#bike #food #waste #sustainability #composting

$10,598 USD
raised by 136 people in 7 days

26% funded
24 days left

$40,000 USD goal
Flexible Funding

Your contribution
$5, $10, $100

CONTRIBUTE NOW

SELECT A PERK

$25 USD + Shipping

FREE: T Shirt
Limited number of discounted shirts now available! Nab that worm, you early bird!
DSNY Organic Waste Diversion Strategy:

DSNY believes that a strong organic waste diversion strategy for NYC will operate at three scales:

① at a citywide level,
② in communities and neighborhoods, and
③ in the home.

This tiered approach enables the City to divert the greatest amount of organic waste from landfills; build support for and participation in organic waste recycling; and generate high-quality finished compost in NYC to improve soils and public health.
Included in this map are all community compost sites affiliated with the NYC Compost Project.

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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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The NYC Compost Project works to rebuild NYC’s soils by providing New Yorkers with the knowledge, tools, and opportunities they need to produce and use compost locally.

The project is funded and managed by the NYC Department of Sanitation’s Bureau of Waste Prevention, Reuse and Recycling. Learn more at nyc.gov/compostproject.
New York Compost Project, New York City
The NYC Compost Project cultivates community leaders through its *Master Composter Certificate Program*.

These leaders volunteer their time to conduct public workshops, provide community outreach, bring people to gardens, and spread compost.
What is community-based composting?

Community composting keeps the process and product as local as possible while engaging the community through participation and education.

Compost builds community! (Photo: NYC Compost Project)

Download the free Growing Local Fertility: A Guide to Community Composting at www.ilsr.org/growing-local-fertility
Principles

- Resources recovered
- Locally based and closed loop
- Organic materials returned to soils
- Community-scaled and diverse
- Community engaged, empowered, and educated
- Community supported

Joint project of ILSR’s Composting for Community Project and the former Highfield’s Close the Loop program (*no longer exists*)

Supported by a grant by the Utilities Programs, USDA
Types of Community Programs

1. Community gardens
2. Farms
3. Schools
4. Drop-off networks
5. Collection entrepreneurs
6. On-site composters
7. Off-site composters
8. Demonstration and community leader training sites
9. Worker-owned cooperatives
10. Home-based or homesteader hubs

City Sprouts offers pedal-powered collection service to neighboring restaurants within a 2 mile radius (Philadelphia)
Community-Based Composters Identified & Surveyed

- 43 sites identified to survey in US
- 26 sites participated in survey
- Others identified after survey
- 31 programs profiled in Guide to Community Composting

15 different states, and DC:
NY MA PA AZ OH WI MN IL OK UT VT CA KY NC ME
Type of Compost Operation (Check all that apply):

- Public: 23% (6)
- Private: 38% (10)
- Non-profit: 62% (16)
- Farm: 23% (6)
- On-site (composting done where material is generated): 42% (11)
- Off-site (material is transported to composting site from elsewhere): 65% (17)
- Urban: 69% (18)
- Collection service provider: 46% (12)
- Food production: 38% (10)
- Finished compost utilized where composting takes place: 46% (12)

6 additional choices not shown

* 26 total responses, 84% of submissions
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Collection Entrepreneurs
City Sprouts, Philadelphia

[Image of children working with compost]

[Diagram showing compost cycle]

CONTACT: Jen
citysproutsphilly@gmail.com
215-880-0465

Commercial customers provide financial security for our neighborhood compost program - The Compost Coop

Processed at NKCDC Garden Center on Frankford and Berks

Compost given back to customers and Compost Coop members. Remainder donated to community projects and sold by City Sprouts.

Finished compost bagged and distributed
Community Gardens
Urban Farms

Red Hook Community Farm

Growing Power

ECO City Farms
Red Hook Community Farm (Brooklyn)
ECO City Farms (MD)
Worker-owned Cooperatives

Roots Composting

Farmer Pirates

Pedal People
CERO – Boston area co-op

www.cero.coop

Photo credit: Boston Impact Initiative (http://bostonimpact.com)
Please indicate the types of material accepted for composting (Check all that apply):

- Leaves: 81% (21)
- Grass clippings: 65% (17)
- Brush/branches: 35% (9)
- Plant trimmings: 65% (17)
- Manure: 38% (10)
- Other/agricultural waste: 23% (6)
- Compostable foodservice ware/packaging: 38% (10)
- Paper products: 50% (13)
- Food waste (pre-and/or post-consumer): 92% (24)
- Food processing waste (pre-consumer): 65% (17)

3 additional choices not shown

* 26 total responses, 84% of submissions

Please indicate the source of your incoming materials (Check all that apply):

- Residential: 65% (17)
- Restaurants: 54% (14)
- Universities: 27% (7)
- Schools, other: 35% (9)
- Hotels/resorts: 15% (4)
- Supermarket chains: 31% (8)
- Small grocery stores: 42% (11)
- Farms/agriculture: 42% (11)
- Community gardens: 38% (10)
- Other: 46% (12)

3 additional choices not shown

* 26 total responses, 84% of submissions
Composting method used (check all that apply):

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<tr>
<th>Method</th>
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<tr>
<td>Static pile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Windrow</td>
<td>50% (13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forced aeration</td>
<td>27% (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-vessel</td>
<td>35% (9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vermicomposting</td>
<td>42% (11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bin system</td>
<td>42% (11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (Describe)</td>
<td>19% (5)</td>
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* 26 total responses, 84% of submissions

Earth Tub in-vessel compost system at Philly Compost (Philadelphia)

Building a windrow by hand at Red Hook Community Farm (Brooklyn, NY)
Kompost Kids have designed their own 3-bin system built from pallets with a few innovations. They line the bins with filter fabric (which is used in sewers), and use sliding rods (3rd photo) to hold the doors in place and to facilitate ease of removal. Both innovations make the bins more volunteer-friendly.
Kompost Kids (WI)
Drop-off Network

Neighborhood Compost Map

Finding a Composting Site in your Neighborhood

Gardeners and confident composters: share your experience and your bins! You know that the best way to keep organics out of the waste stream is to compost it in your own backyard.

The reasons are many:
- No emissions from transporting organics
- Low tech
- Least expensive

"The map is such an awesome resource!"
- unsolicited email, Philadelphia resident

By placing yourself on the Philly Compost Map, you're not only showing overwhelming interest in composting, you'll also help us quantify reduced carbon and methane emissions for our region.

The more composters, the better for the planet!

Compost sites on the Map are color coded:
- Shared community sites are purple. We ask donors to check with the Site Host before contributing. If your site can accept more organics, or already has more than your household contributing to it, we ask you to share it.
- Private sites are red. We ask that everyone check with the site contact before visiting. If your site cannot handle more organics, or is in a hard-to-access space, we suggest you list it as a private site.
- Yellow sites are folks that would love to find a shared site nearby. If your compost site is near one of these, please contact that neighbor and share your bin!
- Commercial sites are green. We're coming soon to Germantown!
- City sites are blue.

To add your site to the map:
- When viewing the map, click on the Edit button along the left side bar
  If you don't see an Edit button, you'll need to log in to your Google account. If you don't have one, and don't want to create one, send an email to us with the location of your compost site.
- After you click the Edit button, you'll see options along the top left of the map itself.
  - If you are clicked onto a point, you will be directed to edit that point. To create a new point, make sure your cursor is not clicked on anything.
  - Click on the placemark icon (looks like a tear drop) and position it where you'd like.
- Or... While you have the map visible, enter a street address in the map search bar, and select Save to My Map, then to Philly Compost.
- Change teardrop color to red (for private) or purple (for shared) site, and add any other descriptive text to the text box.
- Click the Done button when you are finished (over to the left, where the Edit button was).
Close the Loop!
North East Kingdom, VT

- Rural Regions
- Micro Programs
- Residential Drop Offs
- On-Site Composting

- Food Scrap Dense Regions
- Dedicated Collection Routes
- On-Farm Composters
- Residential Drop Offs
Residential Food Scrap Drop-Off

Come ask me about the Free Compost Collection!
Ferrisburgh Central School Pilot (Vermont)
University of Maine (Orono). Finished compost is used on campus as a soil amendment, for landscaping, farming, and for horticultural classes. Goal is to produce 10 lbs of salad mix per day for one of the cafeterias.
**Do you generate revenue?**

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<th>Yes</th>
<th>63% (19)</th>
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<td>40% (12)</td>
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* 30 total responses, 97% of submissions

**If yes, how? (Check all that apply):**

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<td>Charge collection service fees</td>
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<td>Sell compost</td>
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<td>Sell other soil-amendment product(s)</td>
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<td>Sell vegetables and/ or other food</td>
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* 18 total responses, 58% of submissions

Growing Power sells bags of worm castings: “Black Gold – Worm Power Fertilizer”

Pedal People (Florence/Northampton, MA)

Philly Compost in used grain bag.

Red Hook Community Farm
Challenges: Rate 1 to 10

10 = worst challenge

Access to land

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* 24 total responses, 77% of submissions

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* 27 total responses, 87% of submissions
Challenges: Rate 1 to 10  

10 = worst challenge

**Funding/financing**

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* 26 total responses, 84% of submissions

Farmer Pirates purchased a pick-up truck and trailer with $15,000 from Kickstarter
Assistance needed to help with FINANCING

- “working capital and political buy in”
- “funded staff”
- “Investment in order to get up to a medium size hauling/education company.”
- “Financing for more machinery and labor.”
- “Need funding to acquire larger facility to accommodate demand.”
- “Grant programs designed to encourage onsite site-wide composting for schools and institutions”
- “Increased access to public funding to start pilot programs.”
- “Grants to build more bins, to pay people to turn piles and do collection work, for slightly larger sites to have machinery to turn, for anaerobic digestors.”
- “Training, and funding assistance for improved equipment that mitigates odor and vectors is a #1 priority.”
- “Define an appropriate scale and a financial structure that allows community-based composting to exist with paid staff.”
- “SITE PURCHASE and PREPARATION!”
- “testing of product (e.g., a fund to pay for expensive testing that small sites cannot afford, discounts from labs).”
Challenges: Rate 1 to 10  10 = worst challenge

- “Design appropriate technologies for medium scale composting, cost effective, low cost, durable, has capacity”
- “Set up an engineering ‘challenge’ for new technology (using materials readily available from Home Depot), 60 days or less, no electricity, no moving parts, use in vacant lot until developed, flexible, transportable, 12 months a year, insulated”
- “With the private sector, work with industry partners, to address needs for: more aptly sized and powered equipment (e.g., effective human-powered equipment, smaller and affordable/donated industrial equipment, shared-equipment cooperatives)”
- “We need development of equipment appropriate to our scale, e.g., bicycle-powered sifters and shredders.”

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<th>Lack of adequate equipment designed for small-scale operations</th>
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Training Operators Is Critical

The NYC Compost Project cultivates community leaders through its Master Composter Certificate Program.
“Training, and funding assistance for improved equipment that mitigates odor and vectors is a #1 priority. A trained composter knows the need for proper equipment and systems to ensure and odor free, vermin free operation.”

“Compost operator training or other compost educational programs.”

“Trainings for community members to ensure they're making quality compost.”

“Technical assistance/community educators”

“For urban contexts the compost operator trainings have got to be turned inside out and upside down to recognize some realities about how different success looks in an urban context.”

“Statewide Master Composters classes and certification for small scale thermophilic composting assistance and oversight.”
Neighborhood Soil Rebuilders Training Program

- Identify existing composter training programs & facilitate information sharing among them
  - Create national listserve
  - Create web resources
  - Survey existing programs
- Launch a model Master Composter training program in the DC-metro region in partnership with ECO City Farms
  - Beginner
  - Advanced
  - Master
- Produce a Master Composter Toolkit
- Replicate training program
Neighborhood Soil Rebuilders
DC Dept. of Parks & Rec’s 3-bin system

“Knox” design by Urban Farm Plans (www.urbanfarmplans.com)
What can you do? Some ideas...

- Policy to support diversified infrastructure
- Access to land & funding support
- Technical assistance and tools for locally based systems
- Model locally based systems
- Master Composter Training Program
- Procurement of finished compost
- Spur adequate equipment for small-scale systems
- Promote pay-as-you-throw trash fees and reinvest savings into communities (e.g., community composting, community solar)

Photos:  NYC Compost Project
ILSR’s Hierarchy

Hierarchy For Reducing & Recycling Food Scraps And Other Organic Discards

- Source Reduction
- Edible Food Rescue
- Residential Backyard Composting
- Small-scale, Decentralized Composting
- Centralized Composting or Anaerobic Digestion
- Mechanical Biological Mixed Waste Treatment
- Landfill & Incinerator

Source: Institute for Local Self-Reliance, 2014
Contact

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bplatt@ilsr.org