Food Scraps and Organics Diversion

Adding Food Scraps to the Composting Mix on a Shoestring: A Collaborative Approach

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The issue:
Organics make up about 30% of materials generated in a municipality.

• 18% Food Scraps
• 5% Yard Trimmings
• 7% Soiled Paper
The issue continued:
Organics Generated vs Percent Recycled

Source: NYS DEC
The issue continued:
There were NO facilities in the Capital Region accepting Food Scraps/SSOW
(Schenectady County stopped in 2015)

Source: NYS DEC
The group convened in 2014, and decided to focus on food waste diversion as the single biggest unmet need in the county.

Significant environmental and economic benefits from food waste diversion identified while researching other communities.

A key recommendation was to support and recognize pilot programs developed by Albany County municipalities and/or businesses.
The Town of Bethlehem has had a comprehensive yard waste collection and composting program for over 18 years, but no solution for food scraps.

**We designed a food scraps composting pilot project to include:**

- Education/resources to support backyard composting *(initial survey fall 2016)*

- Accepting limited quantities of food scraps for test composting at our facility from a private hauler *(began in spring 2017)*

- Community "drop spots" for residents’ food scraps; to be brought to Town facility for composting *(in development)*
Successful Strategies

• Model pilot program, in part, on the successes of other communities including:
  Onondaga County, Tompkins County, and Ulster County
Successful Strategies continued

Regional 1-Day Compost Operations Training - September 15, 2016

• Hosted by Town of Bethlehem and Co-sponsored by NYSAR3 and the NYS DEC
• Over 50 participants (including 3 TOB employees) learned from 5 expert presenters who donated their time:
  Bob Rynk, SUNY Cobleskill
  Jean Bonhotal, Cornell Waste Management Institute
  Athena Lee Bradley, Northeast Recycling Council
  Gary Feinland, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
  Phil Holloway, Empire Zero
• Additional peer sharing from experienced participants like our friends at UCRRA and OCRRA.
Successful Strategies Continue

• Selecting engineering consultant, O2 Compost, that was willing to be flexible and work within our very limited budget.

• Working remotely and accepting training from local experts helped bring costs down.
Successful Strategies

• Free, confidential on-line survey of town residents in advance of pilot program (survey launched Fall 2016).
Online Survey

- 350+ residents participated; baseline data of composting activity
- Approx. 50% of residents interested in composting
Online Survey Continued

- Over 70% of residents potentially interested in info & resources
- 58% gave contact info to learn more and keep updated
Successful Strategies continued

- Public/private collaboration between Town of Bethlehem and regional hauler Empire Zero
Successful Strategies continued

• Free and low-cost outreach efforts
Challenges Encountered

• Lack of electricity at Compost Facility
• Late snowstorm in March 2017
• Tragedy with Empire Zero founder/co-owner Phil Holloway taking ill suddenly and unexpectedly, just after first food scraps deliveries began
• Food scraps drop spots idea, while originally approved as part of the pilot, was taken back to drawing board
Challenges Overcome

• Electricity at Highway Garage used temporarily as ASP test site
• Empire Zero resumed deliveries, and business now sold to new owner/operators
• Drop Spots still under development however
ASP test pile up and running!
Next Steps

- ASP Pilot program completion, evaluation
- Backyard compost education and bulk sale of compost units
- Secure funding to establish and grow permanent program
Acknowledgements

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Tyler Holloway
Kat McCarthy
Lisa Ruggero

• Ulster County
• Onondaga County
• Tompkins County

And last but certainly not least, my loving and supportive wife Kristen
Q&A

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