

Composting Case Studies: Cayuga Nature Center, Tompkins County, NY

Three groups have come together in 1998 in Tompkins County, N.Y. to implement a Food Scrap Composting Pilot Project. The partnership, made up of the Cayuga Nature Center (CNC), Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, and Wegmans of Ithaca, hopes to divert over 300 tons of material from landfill disposal in its first year. The importance of the project lies in developing an economically feasible system of producing a high-quality finished product to serve as an example to businesses and institutions and produce a soil-enhancing resource.

The Cornell Waste Management Institute and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation are providing technical support. CNC manages the actual compost operation.

Separation and Collection

Food scraps for the pilot program are from Wegmans grocery store of Ithaca. They have been chosen because of the company's record for source separation at several other stores. An Environmental Management team in each store analyzes the waste stream and recovers what they can. When it comes to food, a hierarchy is followed. First, food that is a little bruised is used in store baking, next it is given away to soup kitchens and the remainder is collected in 30-gallon totes on the produce floor for composting. An estimated 1 to 3 tons per week of scrap is collected in a 30 cubic yard roll-off container at the larger stores. This dumpster is transported every two or three weeks by a certified hauler to the CNC composting site. The hauler bears the responsibility for sanitizing the roll-off.

Wegmans and CNC negotiate a tipping fee depending upon local disposal fees to offset the cost of management. Wegmans contracts with and pays for the hauler.

Compost Method

CNC will incorporate the food scraps into the existing manure composting program on their farm. Each delivery of food scraps will be weighed and recorded, and a time and economic analysis will be completed for each piece of equipment. The food scraps will be bulked with wood chips and agricultural residuals. CNC has a bucket loader for this process. The mixed scraps, wood chips and manure will then be formed into windrows for composting. Windrows are built on the farm portion of CNC land.

CNC will endeavor to make the project a community education tool. They will develop educational signage and a brochure for the site. A local school is interested in using the site for teaching once the food scrap composting operation is up and running. The education goal is to provide an example that will give others enough information to start their own economically viable food scrap composting projects. In addition, a 3-day course will be given in August 1999 on incorporating food scrap composting into existing sites.

The Cornell Waste Management Institute provided technical assistance to the project and developed this Case Study. The project was funded in part by Empire State Development Office of Recycling Market Development. October 1998

Cornell Waste Management Institute ©1996
Dept of Soil and Crop Sciences
Bradfield Hall, Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853-5601
cwmi@cornell.edu