

**Managing Organic Residuals
Program Work Team – Annual Meeting Summary
Cornell Waste Management Institute**

Date: April 6, 2010

Location: Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, Ithaca, NY

Purpose: The purpose of the PWT is to gain guidance from participants on what direction CWMI should take in research and outreach to be able to answer stakeholders' questions, as well as to provide updates on current programs and share newly developed resources.

Meeting Summary: The annual PWT meeting drew a lively group of 35 diverse stakeholders together. This year's meeting focused on 1) composting education and sustainability at colleges and universities, 2) small scale composting – home and secondary schools, 3) update on CWMI projects and, 4) requests for research and/or information.

Tours: Tour 1: Cayuga Compost, Trumansburg, NY by Mark Wittig

Tour 2: Cornell University Farm Services Composting Facility by Jean Bonhotal and Mary Schwarz

Introductions and Issue Discussions:

Composting Education and Sustainability at Colleges and Universities:

- Several of the participants were from Colleges and Universities that are either:
 - ✓ Currently composting
 - ✓ Trying to implement composting
 - ✓ Diverting their waste to composting, or
 - ✓ Fielding questions from other schools that want to start composting.
- When composting gets started, the schools are not always prepared: For example, TC3 set up their composting program over the Christmas break and when the students returned, they were not prepared, so the program has had its roadblocks. Education on what compost is and how to separate is extremely important.
- Students at Colgate and SUNY Cortland are very interested in sustainability and nutritional issues. With the signing of the American College and University President's Climate Commitment by hundreds of school presidents, this is a common occurrence on campuses across the US. *How can we best help these institutions meet these green initiatives?*
- Sun Chips has started packaging their 10 ½ ounce chips in 100% compostable bags and want colleges to do some research with them, to assess degradation in different composting environments. They are interested in involving college students in these trials.
- Compostable packaging and service ware can be a problem. In 2008, the organic research farm at Cornell University wanted to use Cornell Farm Services compost. However, when they applied to the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA-NY) for certification, it was denied because compostable service ware was one of the feedstocks in the compost. Even though it was less than 0.5% of the feedstocks, it contained degraded plastic service ware and was denied.
- This is an issue that needs to be resolved because it interferes with sustainability issues. Colleges and Universities are trying to reduce their use of disposable items, but is compostable "disposable" the way to go?
- The US Composting Council (USCC) has a standard for compostable items through their Biodegradable Logo Project (<http://www.compostingcouncil.org/programs/logo/>). All products

certified in the program must pass specifications of the American Society of Testing Materials (ASTM). Qualified products are then allowed to use the logo. “Plastic products carrying this symbol have been scientifically proven and independently certified to biodegrade and compost satisfactorily in well-run municipal and commercial composting facilities.” They also certify biodegradable plastics that are used as coatings on paper and other compostable substrates. More information on this can be found at <http://www.bpiworld.org/> Biodegradable Products Institute.

- *It was suggested that we work with NOFA on this USCC list.*
- OCRRA has looked to Cedar Grove Composting in Washington to provide an acceptable list of compostables - <http://www.cedar-grove.com/acceptable/Accepted%20List.asp>
- As more and more products become recyclable and/or compostable, education concerning where these items are disposed becomes extremely important.

Small-Scale Composting: Home and Secondary Schools:

- There has been an upsurge in interest in home composting and school composting recently.
- Many Cornell Cooperative Extension Offices are training folks in composting so they can train others. To find places that offer training, education and/or demonstrations, see CWMI’s compost facility map located at <http://compost.css.cornell.edu/maps.html>
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County does a lot of this training: <http://www.ccetompkins.org/compost/>. They are also going to be starting a neighborhood composting program and possibly an earn a bin program where home owners get a free composting bin as long as they report back on how they use it and how it works.
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County holds workshops 4 times a year and has extensive compost education and demonstration. They also work with secondary schools that are interested in composting.
- CWMI has information on their website for small-scale and backyard composting (<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/smallscale.htm>) as well as composting in the schools (<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/resources.htm#youthteacher>).

Update on CWMI projects:

- Mortality Composting: CWMI is looking at drug residuals (barbiturates, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and wormers) in mortality and manure composting. This could be an issue as more and more horses and cows are being composted.
- CWMI will be doing workshops around the state on mortality composting so that farms can manage them effectively and integrate composting into nutrient management plans to comply with CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) regulations. We are looking for places to hold the demonstrations and workshops.
- CWMI has been awarded funding from the National Institutes of Health to help address the issue of soil contamination in urban community gardens.
- Our website continues to be extensively used, with home composting, composting fact sheets and natural rendering getting most of the hits.
- We are currently working on instructions for people to not only compost in their homes, but also for source separation for community collection.

Requests for Research and/or Information:

- Composting in schools:
 - ✓ Workshops for cafeteria workers, teachers, etc to get all schools set to go on composting
 - ✓ A 2-page fact sheet on composting in schools that gives the basics including pitfalls and challenges
 - ✓ A short video or poster for kitchen workers – portray the process pictorially only
- Work with Walmart on their initiative for food waste.

- Work on getting funding from private industry on how to incorporate food waste into the already existing yard waste facilities. Since they are already composting yard waste, it could be a natural transition to incorporate industrial and commercial food scraps. This would also allow local schools to get involved. DEC might be able to help with this.

Tour:

Cayuga Compost: 3225 Agard Rd., Trumansburg, NY, <http://www.cayugacompost.com/index.htm>

Mark Wittig showed the group around his composting facility which composts multiple feedstocks from throughout Tompkins County. His facility accepts leaf and yard waste, food scraps (both pre and post plate), food processing waste and floral waste from the municipality, institutions, area restaurants, schools, supermarkets, greenhouses, and commercial landscapers for a tip fee.

He walked the group through his process and showed us how he handles windrows from collection through curing and contaminants pile (all the non-compostable material that is screened out of the compost). One thing that gets screened out is the plastic liners from milk cartons. “Why,” he asks, “would I accept these cartons, if they are not fully compostable?” The answer was easy: He needs to make it worthwhile for the schools to compost. Since these milk cartons are the bulk of their waste stream, not having to separate them from the food makes it doable.

Cornell University Farm Services Composting Facility: Stevens Rd., Ithaca, NY

Cornell composts pre and post plate food scraps from the dining halls on campus, floral waste and trimmings from the greenhouses on campus, crop waste from the campuses farms and manure and bedding from research animals and the college of Veterinary Medicine. All material comes from campus facilities, no waste is accepted from outside the University.

This facility provides a value-added product that is applied to the 1000+ acres owned by Cornell as an agricultural amendment to soil for crops that will be fed to livestock. It also provides a site for compost research. See <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/farmservices.pdf> for a full case study of Cornell’s organic residual separations, collection and composting.

Other:

- USCC will be offering a 5 day Compost Operator’s Training Course at SUNY Cobleskill August 2 -6, 2010. USCC has written the curriculum and CWMI, SUNY Cobleskill, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Association for Reduction, Reuse and Recycling (NYSAR3), CT Department of Environmental Protection, Northeast Recycling Council (NERC) and NY-Solid Waste Association of North America (NY-SWANA) are partnering. After completing the course, attendants will receive certification as a compost operator. <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/trainingcourse.pdf>.
- Help the Environmental Finance Center at Syracuse University promote buying, selling and trading locally grown food through <http://nyfoodtrader.org> and manure and more through <http://nyagtrader.org>.
- COMING SOON: Another resource that is in production is a composting video that will discuss vermicompost production and use. It will highlight the microorganisms that do the work in composting.