

2001 PROGRAM WORK TEAM ANNUAL REPORT

Managing Wastes: Composting and Land Application PWT (PWT 2001-24)

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The formation of the Managing Wastes PWT (MWPWT) involved stakeholders in the development of the petition and plan. Through email and phone contacts, extension educators, staff from several state agencies, faculty and staff from 7 departments at Cornell, public and private practitioners (composters, waste managers) and NGO personnel discussed the needs and opportunities for managing organic wastes in NYS. There was enthusiasm for the creation of the MWPWT from all players. At a meeting in August, 2001, 18 MWPWT members came together, shared information about their current activities, developed a description of research and extension needs and discussed future activities. A draft meeting summary was shared with the full membership for comment and was revised and finalized. Both the petition for formation of the MWPWT and the summary of the August meeting, as well as a list of the MWPWT members, are available on the WWW (through the WMI website at www.cfe.cornell.edu/wmi).

Stakeholders are engaged not only through direct participation in the MWPWT, but also through interactions with and among PWT members. For example, work on a number of identified priorities has included presentations and discussion at a meeting organized by the NYS Energy Research and Development Authority attended by approximately 60 persons interested in farm-based composting. These included agency staff (soil and water, Empire State Development, Ag and Markets, DEC, NYSERDA), organizations (Farm Bureau, Biocycle), as well as farmers and their consultants and educators (including CCE educators). This meeting provided an opportunity for input from these participants as well as to provide information to them. Similarly, a workshop on the newly developed compost planning computer model, "Co-Composter," developed by Cornell PWT members to assist in planning composting on farms provided an opportunity for training users and for getting feedback to further improve the model which is now available free on the WWW (access through CWMI site).

Development of a collaborative proposal to assess the impact of herbicides carried over into composts involved direct response to a need identified through the MWPWT. Proposal development involved engaging stakeholders and a multi-disciplinary team in developing the scope and project plan and collaborators include many external stakeholders. The proposed project integrates research and extension. Other proposed projects likewise involve several departments at Cornell, as well as extension educators, practitioners and agencies.

An active multi-state research and extension project on land application of sludges involving 8 states and the Canadian province of Ontario is providing opportunities for collaboration. A major IFAFS proposal was anticipated to come from this group, so the apparent hiatus in that program is unfortunate. However, plans for a future application in the area of the use of residuals in agriculture will proceed.

Current activities (most of which combine research and extension and involve stakeholders) include: Research and extension on on-farm composting of manure, co-composting with other residuals, carcass and butcher waste composting, marketing of composts; home composting research into pathogens and related extension; extension re "just mow it" alternative to collecting grass; investigation of elevated copper in manure, soils and composts; investigation of farm-based compost quality; research into the control of Johnes disease through composting; technical assistance and education on creating quality composts; composting toilets as alternative to septics; research and extension re compost in turf as IPM alternative.