

# Innovation Trail

Reporting on the innovation economy in upstate New York

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INNOVATIVE COMPOSTING

## Worm Power putting earthworms to work

By [Zack Seward \(/list/author/171\)](/list/author/171) Fri, 10/08/2010 - 11:41



[http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wxi/files/201010/worms\\_cu.jpg](http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wxi/files/201010/worms_cu.jpg)

Zack Seward / WXXI

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Some Worm Power employees on the job. When they finish chewing through this cow manure, it'll be high-end organic compost.

According to owner Tom Herlihy, there's a running joke among local chamber of commerce officials. They like to say that [Worm Power \(http://www.wormpower.net/\)](http://www.wormpower.net/) is Livingston County's largest employer.

Total workforce at the Avon, N.Y. facility: about 60 million.

“The worms are our workers,” says Herlihy, sitting in front of one of his brand new composting beds. “My job is to create the maximum environment for them and to keep them fat, dumb and happy.”

Herlihy’s army of earthworms works around the clock converting cow manure from [a nearby dairy](#) (<http://www.coynefarms.com/>) into plant fertilizer that’s certified organic.

The end product is called vermicompost, a finely-ground living soil amendment that provides nutrients to growing crops.

Researchers from [Cornell University](#) (<http://www.cals.cornell.edu/>) say the vermicompost is also able to suppress plant diseases.

“We’re looking at something that could be a pesticide alternative,” says Allison Jack, a PhD candidate at Cornell who’s been doing [research with Worm Power’s vermicompost](#) (<http://www.css.cornell.edu/cwmi/vermicompost.html>) since 2006.

“You can actually get disease control with a natural biological substance,” says Jack. “And in this case it’s one that’s made out of a recycled waste product.”

In the world of organic agriculture that’s a big deal.

Owner Herlihy says business is booming for Worm Power. Customers include golf courses, vineyards and high-end greenhouses. Herlihy says his compost sold out this year and the company had to get bigger to accommodate demand.

Worm Power recently completed an eight-fold expansion of its production facilities. A big chunk of the tab was picked up by venture capitalists.

Yesterday, Herlihy showed off the expanded Worm Power facility. Among other officials in attendance was the head of the research arm of the USDA.

Of course, the Innovation Trail was also there, and a video piece on Worm Power will be coming soon.

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