

On-Farm Composting Toolkit

WORKSHEET

FARMERS: BACKBONE OF COMMUNITY

About this worksheet: This worksheet will guide you through some reflection to consider how you currently see farmers aiding in your community and how that needs to develop.

Opening reflection: Consider the range of essential benefits that farmers provide to rural communities that are rarely recognized, appreciated or experienced by non-farmers. Their value goes far beyond the food and agricultural products they produce and provide.

Consider: Getting clearer about the unsung work that farmers do helps lift up the unseen contributions of farmers everywhere – and makes for a more informed starting place to engage with farmers you hope to partner with on community-oriented food scrap diversion programs.

FARMERS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Here are just some of the vital benefits farms and farmers provide in rural communities and beyond. For each of the below "buckets," make some notes about how this particular benefit shows up in the farming where you live. What evidence do you have that farmers are indeed providing this benefit?

Economic stability: Farmers sell agricultural products and create jobs in farming, processing, distribution, and retail. They circulate money within the local economy (on supplies, equipment, and services), supporting other businesses. Successful farms can drive rural development by attracting investment, infrastructure improvements, and technology adoption. They may serve as anchor points for the growth of complementary businesses.

Evidence where I live:

Community identity: Farms help define the cultural identity of rural communities. They embody local traditions, heritage, and ways of life, contributing to a sense of pride and unity. Farming communities often foster strong social connections and support networks among residents. Farmers collaborate during busy seasons, share resources, and contribute to local initiatives. Many also contribute to local disaster relief efforts by providing resources, equipment, and expertise during emergencies like floods, wildfires, or other natural disasters. Farms help preserve agricultural heritage, skills, and knowledge. This contributes to the overall cultural richness of rural communities.

Evidence where I live:

Environmental stewardship: Many (though not all) farmers engage in sustainable practices that, in turn, support ecosystems that sustain all of us. These include building healthy soil, filtering water to offset pollution, sequestering carbon, and supporting pollination. These stewardship benefits extend far beyond the farmer's land. Farms can foster biodiversity through diverse crop and livestock species, conservation practices, and habitat preservation.

Evidence where I live:

Open space and landscape: Farms contribute to the visual aesthetics of rural landscapes, offering scenic views and open spaces such as pastures and fields. Open spaces are critical to a community's overall health, happiness, resilience, and economic vitality through activities such as agrotourism.

Evidence where I live:

Education and outreach: Farms serve as educational resources, providing opportunities for schools and community groups to learn about agriculture, sustainable practices, and food production. Farmers often develop and engage in educational programs or offer farm tours to raise awareness about their work. They may host events, workshops, or farmers' markets, facilitating interactions between rural and urban communities and enriching cultural exchange.

Evidence where I live:

Consider: Assumptions trap us in judgment and prevent movement toward inquiry and understanding. Working through assumptions about any of our partner groups or processes will help you build authentic and productive relationships that will support a more sustainable food scrap diversion program for your community. **Closing reflection:** Given an expanded understanding of the benefits of farming, how do you most want to show up for the farmers where you live? How can this inform how you approach planning a food diversion program?

Visit www.onfarmcomposting.org to submit questions or comments about this tipsheet and download more.

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