

STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Getting from an idea to a successful farm-focused community food scrap diversion program means working patiently through each step of design

What does it take for a community food scrap diversion program to be successful? Without understanding all the pieces needed, assumptions are often made that lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and – ultimately – can derail the best of intentions! Work through the following steps to get moving in the right direction.

Step 1: Decide how you're (collectively) defining "community."

- Is this everyone in your town, folks in the neighborhood where the farm is located, or perhaps it's limited to members of a farm's CSA program?
- Our toolkit includes a worksheet for determining your Project Community
- Be sure all partners and farmer partners share the working definition.

Step 2: Estimate the volume of food scraps

- What is the rough volume of food scraps and other organic materials your Project Community produces in a given time? If you're not sure, consider starting with a community survey to assess current practices.
- What is the volume that a farmer is comfortable accepting?

Volumes may change over time, but it's important to start with a volume the farmer is comfortable managing.

Step 3: Understand what kinds of food scraps and other organics will be collected.

- Depending on the collection system a farmer has or is interested in developing, different parameters will apply to what organics are allowable within your collection program.
- Some farmers are interested in taking meat and dairy products, others are not.
- Some can take fiber-based products, like paper plates, cups, napkins, or paper towels. Others prefer to stick to food-based residuals.
- There is a limited list of materials that certified organic farmers can accept.
- Some farmers can handle large "chunks," and others don't readily have the capacity to cut up bigger pieces of food (like whole pumpkins).

These points need to be clarified before beginning a food scrap diversion program. If a farmer isn't sure, further thinking about the farm composting system may be required.

Step 4: Establish a system for getting the food scraps to the partner farm

Collection and transportation (or hauling) is an easily overlooked component of food scrap diversion programs. When collecting food scraps (from residents, farmers' markets, or schools), it's important to consider how they will be transported to a farm and the type of vehicle needed. Farmers may be too busy to handle this, and community members may not have suitable vehicles (although many creative community members have found simple solutions). Here are some things to consider:

- Do individuals bring their own scraps to the farm, or do scraps need to be picked up?
- Is hauling food scraps something the farmer can and wants to do, or do you need to find someone else?
- What are the rules and regulations around hauling organic materials (small volumes might be exempt)?
- If there are no organic haulers in your area, is there an interested person who could step into this role?
- Will this be a free hauling service?
- Will the farmer charge a “tipping fee” for accepting the scraps?
- Who washes the kitchen caddies or buckets?
- Who is responsible for making sure that the collected scraps are free of non-compostable materials (which contaminate a compost system)?

Step 5: Is it too soon to begin collection?

Hesitation on the part of the recipient farmer is often a signal to slow down. Technical service is often available from university extension services or organizations like CAV.

- Many farmers do not actively compost on their farms. Even if they do compost manures and/or field residue, they may be uncertain about how to effectively and safely integrate food scraps. On-site technical support is often needed, but sharing the resources for farmers from the On-farm Composting Toolkit is a good place to start.
- Farmers often need help understanding the regulatory landscape and any implications of adding food scrap composting to their farm plan.
- While producing compost for use on their farms can be useful, learning best practices for compost use is also really important.

The resources in our Community toolkit aim to foster better understanding of the challenges farmers face initiating community-oriented composting programs on their farms. Take time to support partner farmers so they feel confident when they start accepting food scraps.

Step 6: Check for understanding

Everyone on your project team, including everyone managing food scrap collection, should be able to quickly and easily answer basic questions about the composting program such as:

- What they can divert and why.
- The importance of separating food scraps from non-compostable items (like produce stickers, plastics, metals, etc.).
- The consequences of letting non-compostable contamination slip in.
- What fees (if any) are associated with diverting their food scraps

Did you know? Lower contamination rates at composting sites are associated with relational (vs contractual) approaches on the project team. Know who on your team is taking this on!

Step 7: Commit to regular communication

Setting up effective ongoing communication with both your project team and your Project Community (as you've defined it) is crucial to the program's success. Those internal and external communication systems should, at minimum, cover:

- Information about who is invited to participate in the program and why
- What food scraps and organic materials are accepted and which are not
- Information about the collection process, including contact information, schedules, process, etc.
- Outreach plans in case there are disruptions in the program
- And are likely to include:
 - In person meetings
 - E-newsletters
 - Social media posts
 - Phone calls
 - Signs (permanent as well as special purpose for temporary changes in process)

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

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The On-Farm Composting Toolkit was funded by a USDA Rural Utilities Solid Waste Management Grant. The Composting Association of Vermont is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. Get the full toolkit at www.onfarmcomposting.org.