

FOOD & ORGANICS SUBCOMMITTEE: MEETING #3b

Meeting Date/Time: Wednesday, April 23, 2025, 2:00pm-3:00pm

Attendees

Subcommittee Members

Elaine Blatt, Oregon DEQ
Jeanette Hardison, No Food Left Behind - Corvallis
Elizabeth Cole, City of Beaverton
Holly Stirnkorb, Metro

Facilitator: Pea Hamilton, Start Consulting Group
Subject Matter Expert: Bryce Hesterman, RRS
Researcher: Allegra Starr, RRS

Notes

Key Takeaways

- Multi-family food waste collection faces significant contamination challenges; keeping food separate from yard debris is crucial for processing
- Infrastructure needs include both transfer stations and processing facilities; \$28M in state grants coming for compost facility equipment
- End-market development for compost requires addressing agriculture industry concerns about contamination and guaranteeing product quality

Topics

Multi-Family Food Waste Collection

Examples from Seattle, San Francisco, NYC, London, Toronto, Portland discussed

- Diversion rates range from 25-60%+ across programs
- Key barriers:
 - Contamination (biggest issue, especially with food waste)
 - Space constraints in buildings
 - Ongoing education needs due to tenant turnover
 - "Ick factor" and inconvenience for residents
- Potential solutions:
 - Keeping food waste separate from yard debris (enables de-packaging)
 - Providing countertop collection pails to residents (\$6/unit in Corvallis program)
 - Access to Services Payment Program (Metro) to offset hauler transfer costs
 - Transfer and Processing Infrastructure
- Seattle leader with 5-star rating, high per capita diversion (heavy transfer station investment)
- Massachusetts commercial organics ban very efficient (33,000 tons/\$1M invested)
- San Jose and Toronto incorporating de-packaging with anaerobic digestion

Minnesota shows small investments in mobile de-packaging can serve rural areas

- Barriers:
 - Land use issues for siting facilities (odor concerns, agricultural land restrictions)
 - Need for both transfer capacity and processing facilities
 - Clean feedstock required for anaerobic digestion
- \$28M in state grants coming for compost facility equipment
 - End-Market Development for Compost
- California SB1383: Ambitious 75% diversion target, \$20.9B investment, \$17.7B projected return
- Maryland: Grants for compost use on farms, focus on soil health
- San Diego: Low-cost branding/community engagement approach
- Key challenges:
 - Agriculture industry very risk-averse, concerned about contamination
 - Need to guarantee clean, high-quality compost products

- Existing contracts may limit availability (e.g., Washington state implementation issues)

Ideas

- Multifamily food waste recovery programs can work across different contexts, with the best integrating strong policy, equity-focused outreach, and clear environmental/economic returns.
- Barriers for multifamily programs include contamination, space constraints, education/turnover, and the "ick factor" of handling food waste.
- For processing and transfer infrastructure, the key is having all three components - collection, transfer, and processing capacity - aligned. Siting new facilities can be challenging due to land use issues.
- Various end-market development strategies were discussed, like California's SB 1383 mandate, Maryland's Healthy Soils program, and San Diego's branding/community engagement approach. Ensuring high-quality compost is key for expanding agricultural markets.
- The group noted a potential gap in focusing only on commercial food waste reduction, and suggested also considering residential waste prevention strategies.

Considerations

- Policy support and mandates vs. voluntary programs - The group discussed the pros and cons of both approaches for multifamily food waste recovery.
 - Contamination and quality control - Ensuring high-quality feedstock, whether through separate collection or depackaging technology, was seen as critical for end markets.
 - Education and engagement - Reaching both tenants and property managers was highlighted as a challenge, given high turnover in multifamily housing.
 - Infrastructure capacity - Aligning collection, transfer, and processing infrastructure was viewed as essential, with siting new facilities being a barrier.
 - End market development - Strategies like procurement mandates, branding, and partnerships were discussed as ways to grow compost markets, especially for agricultural uses.
 - Equity considerations - Targeting underserved communities and addressing affordability were noted as important factors in program design.
- Residential waste prevention - The group acknowledged this as a potential gap in the current strategies, which had focused more on commercial food waste.

Questions

- Is the 40% diversion rate for the Portland program was for a single complex or an average across the city?
- Are the compostable bags used in some programs were truly compostable or caused issues for the composters?
- What other barriers, beyond contamination, the group saw for multifamily food waste recovery programs?
- Is the "ick factor" was worse for multifamily compared to commercial settings?
- What are the group's thoughts on whether ideally there would be local processors that haulers could tip at directly, rather than relying on transfer stations?
- Does the group view anaerobic digestion and composting equally, or is one preferred over the other?

Action: Research and analysis

- Investigate the details behind the 40% diversion rate cited for the Portland multifamily program - Allegra agreed to look into whether that was for a single complex or an average.
 - Gather more information on the California SB 1383 program, particularly the compost procurement mandates for local governments - The group noted this was a relevant strategy to explore further.
 - Examine the challenges and lessons learned from Washington state's compost procurement requirements for local governments - The group discussed how this had created some compliance issues initially.
 - Provide additional details on the range of end market development approaches, beyond just the examples presented - Allegra offered to share more information on these strategies.
 - Explore residential waste prevention strategies more explicitly, rather than just focusing on commercial food waste - Elizabeth pointed out this as a potential gap that should be addressed.
- Incorporate information from the DEQ's ongoing research project to assess processing capacity and needs across Oregon – Elaine mentioned this work was underway.