

Organics Management Guide Submission

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Select the Primary Entity Type Please identify the category that best represents your project: Nonprofit or Non-Governmental Organization

Questions:

- 1. Background: Provide context for the program, project, or policy — why it was developed, when it began, and the problem or opportunity it addresses.**

We operate two small scale on-farm composting systems that turn food scraps into food grade compost for our urban farms. The first site in Bladensburg, MD has been operational since 2022 and the other site in Upper Marlboro, MD has been operational since 2024.

- 2. Summary: Briefly describe the initiative, including its goals, location, and primary outcomes.**

Our goal was to produce food grade quality compost for our farms. The quality of compost being produced at large scale industrial sites is not always high quality. Either it is not fully finished compost (still hot), it lacks microbial diversity (due to large pile sizes and inadequate moisture content) or contains microplastics (from contaminated feedstocks). As a certified naturally grown farm, we sought to make our compost in house to a standard we deem acceptable for vegetable production.

- 3. Percent of Overall Diverted Material: If available, include data or estimates on the portion of the community or organization's total diverted material no longer associated with the waste stream that this program or policy addresses.**

Our Bladensburg site is only operational 10 months out of the year due to our reliance on solar for our aeration system. Our Upper Marlboro site is operational year round. Combined they process roughly 90 tons of food scraps annually.

4. Key Program Elements or Policy Provisions: Describe the structure and main components of your program or policy. Explain the investments origins (who, how much). Please include as many of the following elements as applicable: What types of materials are being managed? (e.g., surplus recoverable foods, food scraps, wasted food. How are these materials managed? Who is responsible for managing them? (Organizations, agencies, businesses, or other entities) What products are generated, and how are they utilized or managed? (e.g., compost, animal feed, energy products) Who funds the management of these materials? (Funding sources, grants, partnerships) Who generates these materials? (Identify the origin: households, institutions, businesses, etc.)

- 1) Food scraps brought to us by local composting company Compost Crew. Leaves from local municipalities. Wood chips from tree crews.
- 2) 3:1 ratio of browns (leaves & wood chips) to greens (food scraps) mixed into piles and put into aerated static pile bays for initial 2 months then traditional windrowing plus curing phase
- 3) We manage the compost production at Bladensburg while Compost Crew manages compost production at Upper Marlboro site.
- 4) Compost is produced and used on the farms
- 5) Bladensburg site was initially funded by an EPA grant and Upper Marlboro site was initially funded by a USDA-CFWR grant.
- 6) Households in Prince George's County who either pay for the service or are covered by municipalities who pay for the collection service

5. Regulatory Impact: Describe how laws, policies, regulations, and/or code have affected your program or project. This may include positive, negative, or neutral impacts. Consider noting which regulations apply, how they influenced implementation or operations, any challenges or barriers encountered, and how compliance requirements shaped program decisions.

The on-farm composting exemption is the reason why these sites are possible. In Maryland, any sites which occupy less than 10,000 square feet and process food scraps are exempt from obtaining a compost facility permit so long as they utilize best management practices and keep an orderly and safe site.

6. Measurable Increase in Supply: Include data or qualitative outcomes showing growth in collection, diversion, or reuse volumes if available.

We no longer need to buy compost from industrial facilities at our Bladensburg farm. The Upper Marlboro farm is a patchwork of 10 different farming businesses and is on a much larger parcel. Some of the farmers are still buying compost from off site but our goal is to have that farm also be entirely self sufficient for compost needs.

7. Behavior Change: Describe whether the initiative resulted in measurable behavior change and explain how you determined this. If behavior change occurred, outline the strategies that proved most effective. Please include any available data or evidence that supports your findings.

At Eco City, we have pushed for the incoming stream of food scraps to be food scraps only not compostables. Compost Crew are the haulers and the company who deals directly with the customers. New municipal contracts where the food scraps are being brought to our farms are food scraps only (with the exception of the bin liners).

Once food scraps arrive at the farms all compostable plastics (bin liners included) are removed by Compost Crew as a part of our contract with them.

While not a complete change in behavior, we are still working to phase compostables out completely from food scrap streams that go to small scale on-farm facilities. We believe compostables pose a threat to the creation of high quality food grade compost.

8. Benefits and Impacts (Economic, Environmental, and Social): Describe the economic, environmental, and social sustainability impacts of the program, policy, or initiative. This may include both positive and negative outcomes. You may address impacts such as costs or savings, job creation, waste reduction, emissions, resource conservation, community engagement, equity, or public health. Please include data or qualitative observations where available and note any trade-offs or challenges.

We are diverting food scraps from the landfill while creating high quality compost to revitalize our soils. As a certified naturally grown farm, the main input to our soil is compost. Since we are making the compost in house, testing it regularly and ensuring it is free of contaminants we are restoring the natural nutrient cycle into our soil. Our

vegetables are being grown by microbes which means they are stronger and more resilient to pest damage and volatile weather events.

9. How Stakeholder Buy-In Was Achieved: Explain how the program gained support from key stakeholders (e.g., government agencies, businesses, residents, nonprofits).

The key to the success of these sites is in our relationship with Compost Crew. They benefit from not paying tipping fees at our sites while we benefit from high quality food grade compost. We have also benefited from having a few municipalities in our area who were willing to partner with us on grant applications and pay for food scrap collections.

10. Stakeholders' Perspectives and Dynamics at Play: Highlight collaboration dynamics, challenges, or differing stakeholder interests and how they were addressed.

Since we are primarily responsible with the end quality of the compost but do not have access to the machinery to process the material ourselves we rely on regular access to a skid steer to do the processing. Compost Crew lends their machine to us to process the machine and turn it from food waste into compost. This has been challenging because the machine is used across various sites. It can be burdensome to transport it and there are times when we need to machine but do not have access to it.

Ultimately our vision for creating high quality material is shared and therefore we are able to make it work but having access to our machine would certainly help meet this goal.

11. Lessons Learned: Share what worked well, what didn't, and recommendations for others seeking to replicate your approach.

Small scale sites processing 1 ton per week of food scraps are not going to be immensely profitable. Compost Crew is able to manage the sites since they are getting paid to pick up the scraps but the margins are thin. My salary is paid from various different grants and composting is not my only job on the farm.

While I believe that small sites need to be prioritized in the future of composting, there is a real question of longevity since the sites rely so heavily on grant funding.

A big facility makes their money from tipping fees which tends to mean more volume. More volume means less attention to detail on quality. Food waste diversion targets tend to overlook the importance of creating a high quality end product. If more industrial sites are built I worry that while we may meet diversion targets the end products may not be suitable for all land application uses (specifically for food production).