

# The State of Sustainable Organics Management in New York State

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# New York State

- 141,300 square kilometers (54,600 square miles)
- More than 19.5 million residents
- A GDP of more than \$1.5 trillion
- 62 counties, 60+ cities, and 930+ towns
- The Adirondack Park covers one-fifth of the State
- NYC contains roughly half of the State's residents

# Food and Organic Waste in NYS

- The U.S. wastes 33% of its food<sup>1</sup>
- 48% of food waste occurs in residential homes<sup>1</sup>
- 35% is produce and 20% is prepared foods<sup>1</sup>
- 17 percent (3 million tons) of MSW is food scraps<sup>2</sup>
- 7 percent (1.3 million tons) of MSW is yard trimmings<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ReFED. (2022). Insights Engine.

<sup>2</sup> NYSDEC. (2023). NYS Solid Waste Management Plan.

# The New York State Food Donation and Food Scraps Recycling Law

- Passed in 2019 and enacted in January 2022
- Generators of 2 tons of food scraps per week
- Donate edible food to local hunger relief organizations
- Recycle food scraps if within 25 miles of a facility
- K-12 schools and hospitals are exempt

# Pending Amendment to the Law

- An amendment passed the NYS Senate and Assembly during the 2024 legislative session
- Entities that generate a half-ton or more of food scraps per week will be subject to the law by 2028
- Expands distance to recyclers from 25 to 50 miles
- Governor Hochul has not yet signed the bill

# Impacts of the Law

- 874 large generators were identified by NYSDEC, 284 (one-third) are required to recycle
- 20,147 tons of food was donated in 2022
- 266,468 tons of food scraps were recycled in 2022
- More organics recycling facilities are being planned

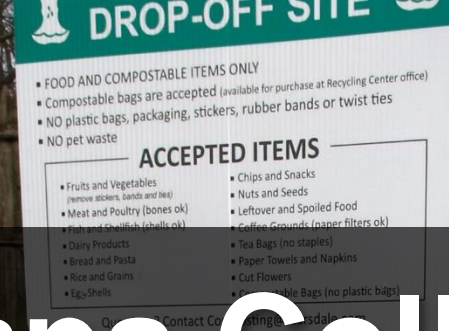
ENHANCED SCREENED  
COMPOST

# Food Donation

- Large generators are required to donate food even if they receive a recycling waiver
- NYS has 10 regional food banks, each with hundreds of local partners (e.g., food pantries)
- Feeding NYS acquired 4.2 million pounds of food donations in 2023
- Food rescue networks are being established to help fill gaps of the food banking system

# Food Scraps Collection

- Large waste hauling companies are beginning to offer collection services, primarily for commercial entities
- DSNY in NYC is rolling out curbside collection across its five boroughs (starting on Sunday)
- Independently owned micro-haulers offer residential collection in some upstate NY communities
- Food scraps drop-off programs are being initiated by communities that lack hauling services





# Large-Scale Composting Sites

- 66 permitted and 154 registered sites, including yard debris and biosolids sites
- Sited near major cities including Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, and NYC
- Turned windrow and aerated-static pile systems
- Initial capital costs, siting, negative public opinion, and financial sustainability are top challenges

# Anaerobic Digestion (AD)

- 4 permitted and 1 registered facilities, including operations that only accept food waste
- Packaged and liquid food waste (e.g., acid whey)
- Some communities are retrofitting water resource recovery facilities (WRRFs) to co-digest food waste
- Most of NYC's food waste is co-digested at the Newtown Creek wastewater treatment plant
- Per the law, a proportional amount of the digestate must be beneficially used

# Community Composting

- DSNY established the NYC Compost Project in 1993
- Collectively diverted 8.3 million pounds of food scraps and organic materials annually
- Food scraps collected via bicycles and drop-off sites, and processed at community sites across the city
- Educates and employs youth and uses the finished compost to rebuild city soils

# Residential Education

- Cornell Cooperative Extension's Master Composters Program is a "train-the-trainers" initiative with 10 weeks of in-depth lessons and hands-on experience
- NYS Compost Awareness Week activities including local media campaigns, how-to workshops, movie screenings, bin sales, site tours, compost giveaways
- Recycling coordinators conduct outreach and education and provide how-to resources

# Compost Use and Markets

- Compost used for agriculture, construction, erosion control, top dressing, residential gardens/landscaping
- Companies making soil blends for green roof media, urban agriculture, topdressing applications, etc.
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial assistance to farmers for compost
- More robust markets are needed

# NYSAR3's Organics Council

- More than 120 members statewide
- Monthly virtual meetings and an email listserv
- Programmatic updates, funding opportunities, resource sharing, and peer-to-peer support
- Free to participate



Image Credit: MeiLin Luzadus/OCRRA

# Annual NYS Organics Summit

- The first summit was held in 2015 (10 years)
- Attendance has grown to more than 220
- Two full days of sessions and a half-day of tours
- Topics include composting, AD, food scraps collection, compostable products, contamination, education, etc.
- Fundraising mechanism for NYSAR3 and sustainable organics initiatives and support

A man wearing a grey hat, glasses, and a high-visibility safety vest is speaking into a microphone. He is standing on a paved path at a compost site, with large piles of dark brown compost in the background. A group of people, also wearing safety vests, are listening to him. Some are looking at their phones. The sky is overcast.

# Compost Site Operators Training

- Free one-day trainings, five held across the state
- Funded by the NYSDEC, coordinated by CET, and led by James McSweeney
- Half-day lecture, half-day field exercises
- CREF will conduct a five-day Compost Operations Training Course (COTC) in NYS later in 2025



# Assistance for Community Leaders

- No-cost TA provided by Syracuse University's CSCS, Cornell University's CWMI, RIT's NYSP2I, and CET
- In-person workshops, webinars, guidance documents, interactive tools, one-on-one support
- Develop local organics management plans, pilot initiatives, and scaling-up pilots to ongoing programs

# Federal and State Funding

- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Environmental Protection Agency grants (EPA)
- NYSDEC through the State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)
- Primarily available to municipal and nonprofit entities (not the private sector)
- For staff time, feasibility studies, planning, equipment, vehicles, supplies, education and outreach

# Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA)

- Reduce GHG emissions by 40% by 2030 and 85% by 2050 (from 1990 levels)
- Sector strategies focus on transportation, buildings, electricity, industry, agriculture, waste, and more
- Organic waste reduction and recycling strategies are detailed in the 2022 scoping plan

# **NYSDEC 10-Year Solid Waste Management Plan - Organics Goals**

- Prioritize commercial, industrial, and institutional sectors
- Develop the organics recycling industry
- Empower and educate residents
- Expand markets for products made from organics
- Engage farmers and the agricultural community

**2024**

**S** Syracuse University  
College of Engineering  
& Computer Science

Center for Sustainable  
Community Solutions

# Questions?

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Image Credit: Jesse Kerns/Town of Bethlehem