



Massachusetts
Department
of
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION

fact sheet

Supermarket Organics Recycling in Massachusetts

In its *Beyond 2000 Solid Waste Master Plan*, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) identified food waste diversion as a priority focus for the state's waste reduction efforts.

At nearly 900,000 tons per year, food waste represents an estimated 19 percent of all commercial waste generated in Massachusetts. But less than one-tenth of that total is currently being recycled, composted, or otherwise diverted from disposal.

MassDEP has identified supermarkets as a major generator of organic wastes, with more than 400 full-service grocery stores in the state discarding an estimated 90,600 tons of material per year.

Reducing Waste & Saving Money

Waste disposal represents a significant and growing business cost for the supermarket industry, particularly in Massachusetts where disposal fees range from \$80 to \$100 per ton.

As a retail sector, supermarkets operate on very slim profit margins. Since between 75 and 85 percent of the waste they generate is biodegradable, sending their organics to large-scale composting operations or to farms for animal feed is a money-saving alternative to disposal, not to mention better for the environment.

Supermarkets across Massachusetts seem to agree. As of May 2008, more than 200 stores from six major chains – Big Y Foods, Hannaford Bros., Roche Bros., Shaw's, The Stop & Shop Supermarket Co. LLC, and Whole Foods Markets – were diverting organics to reuse or recycling and saving between \$3,000 and \$20,000 per location per year in disposal costs.

Supermarket Recycling Program Certification

MassDEP and the Massachusetts Food Association (MFA) in 2003 signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to establish the Supermarket Recycling Program Certification (SRPC) program. The idea behind the initiative is to encourage full-service grocery stores to develop sustainable programs for recycling and reusing organics and other materials.

To participate in the voluntary program, a supermarket needs to establish and maintain a comprehensive recycling and reuse program, then document its efforts by submitting a certification to MassDEP. Participating stores not only save money, but also improve their compliance with existing Massachusetts waste disposal bans – rules that prohibit disposal of certain materials that can be recycled.

By obtaining SRPC status, a full-service grocery store can qualify for relief from some regulatory requirements. Specifically, truckloads of trash from that store are not subject to comprehensive inspection when they arrive at transfer stations or disposal facilities.

Stores With Organics Diversion Programs (Through May 2008)			
Participating Supermarket Chains	Massachusetts Locations	Stores Diverting Organics	SRPC Stores
Big Y Foods	29	16	16
Hannaford Bros.	25	20	20
Roche Bros.	17	14	12
The Stop & Shop Supermarket Co.	121	121	0
Shaw's Supermarkets	93	22	17
Whole Foods Market	18	16	16
Total	303	209	81

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Supermarket Organics Recycling Highlights & Milestones

MassDEP has worked closely with the supermarket industry since 1996 to develop cost-effective waste reduction and diversion programs. Here is a brief summary of initiatives and results to date:

1996-2002, Technical Assistance to Supermarkets

- Partners: MassDEP and Center for Ecological Technology (CET)
- Established organics diversion programs in four Big Y and 15 Stop & Shop locations in Western Massachusetts and on Cape Cod.

2002, Supermarket Recycling Organics Initiative (SROI)

- Partners: MassDEP, MFA and WasteCap of Massachusetts
- Published a step-by-step guide for the supermarket industry: "Recycling Organics Initiative: A Handbook for Supermarket Program Managers"
- Engaged supermarket upper management in discussions regarding store organics recycling implementation.
- Provided start-up and technical assistance at four Roche Bros. supermarkets. The chain has since grown its organics recycling program to include 14 of 17 stores.

Roche Bros. Pilot

Project demonstrated the waste reduction and cost benefits of using a dedicated organics compactor.

- **Material Diverted:**
Approximately 5 to 10 tons per store per week
- **Costs Savings:**
Estimated \$10,000 to \$20,000 per store

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2003-2006, Supermarket Organics Recycling Network (SORN)

- Partners: MassDEP, MFA and consultants
- Gathered baseline information on existing Massachusetts supermarket composting programs. Findings:
 - ✓ 54 stores reviewed were then generating approximately 53,300 tons of waste per year.
 - ✓ Nearly two-thirds of this total was being recycled: 26,200 tons of cardboard and 8,900 tons of source-separated organics sent to composting facilities.
 - ✓ The rest – 18,200 tons – was being disposed of as trash.
- Provided program expansion recommendations to participating supermarket chains and identified new chains for inclusion.
- Recognized six supermarket chains with Massachusetts WasteWise Supermarket Recycling Leadership Awards.
- Signed MOU for *Enhancing Recycling in Supermarkets in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*.

2006-Present, Supermarket Recycling Program Certification (SRPC)

- Partners: MassDEP, MFA and consultants
- Launched a voluntary program for supermarkets to document and certify their waste reduction and recycling efforts every other year.
- Approved certifications for more than 80 individual supermarkets so far.
- Two supermarket chains with 80 percent or more of their stores participating have achieved chain-wide SRPC status.

For Additional Information

- Visit the MassDEP Supermarket Recycling home page at <http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/supermkt.htm>
- Contact Morgan Harriman of MassDEP at 617-654-6580 or morgan.harriman@state.ma.us