



Department of Environmental Protection

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Organics Action Plan

November 2023

Background

Massachusetts food waste diversion has increased from a baseline of 100,000 tons prior to implementing our initial food waste ban to 360,000 tons in 2022, an increase of 260,000 tons on an annual basis. At the same time, food rescue of fresh and perishable foods has grown by more than 50%, the number of businesses separating food scraps from disposal has increased from 1,350 in 2014 to 3,100 in 2022, and Massachusetts' capacity to manage food waste has increased dramatically. Waste characterization data reflected similar progress, with food waste decreasing from 26% of trash in 2016 to 21.6% of trash in 2022.

Organics Waste Reduction Goals

The 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan continued Massachusetts' focus on food waste reduction as a priority material for waste reduction in the Commonwealth. The Master Plan established a new goal to reduce disposal of food and other organic materials by an additional 500,000 tons annually by 2030, based off of a 2018 baseline of 280,000 tons of food waste reduction. To achieve this goal, Massachusetts would need to achieve annual food waste diversion of 780,000 tons in 2030. As mentioned above, our current food waste diversion is 360,000 tons, so we will need to increase this amount by 420,000 tons. This Organics Action Plan establishes a working plan for how MassDEP will work with a diverse set of stakeholders to progress towards and achieve this goal.

Programs and Policies Supporting this Plan

[Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan](#) – This plan was completed and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council in 2015. This plan is based on a statewide planning process that was conducted to address the opportunities and challenges of our State's local food system. Inputs Goal 1 of the Plan focuses on reducing wasted food.

[Massachusetts Waste Bans](#) – MassDEP has waste disposal bans that ban the disposal of certain materials in the trash. Commercial organic material, food material, from businesses and institutions that dispose of one ton or more per week, was banned in 2014. In November 2022, MassDEP implemented regulations to reduce the threshold for this ban from one ton to ½ ton per week.

[RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts](#) – This is a free business assistance program funded by MassDEP and run under contract to MassDEP by the Center for EcoTechnology. RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts (RecyclingWorks) provides free assistance via email, phone, and in person, guidance and assistance via online resources, and educational workshops and networking forums to help businesses and institutions to reduce waste. Many of the program resources and tools are focused on reducing food waste.

[Sustainable Materials Recovery Program \(SMRP\)](#) – MassDEP provides grant funding to municipalities through this set of grant programs. MassDEP typically issues a grant application on an annual basis. This program includes grants to support municipal programs to reduce food waste.

[Reduce, Reuse, Repair Micro Grants](#) – MassDEP provides grants of up to \$5,000 to support and foster innovative approaches to advance waste reduction, reuse, and repair in Massachusetts.

[Recycling Business Development Grants \(RBDG\)](#) – MassDEP provides grants to businesses that accept and process recyclable or compostable materials through this program. MassDEP also has expanded this grant program to provide grants for collection equipment for targeted materials, including food scraps. Applications are typically posted on an annual basis. While these grants are limited to specified target materials, food scraps have often been a target material in RBDG.

[Recycling Loan Fund](#) – This program is funded by MassDEP and administered under contract to MassDEP by BDC Capital. The Loan Fund provides loans for recycling, composting, and anaerobic digestion operations. Unlike the RBDG, businesses may apply at any time.

[Recycling Market Development Workgroup](#) – MassDEP has established a Recycling Market Development Workgroup to provide input to MassDEP on the development of a comprehensive Recycling Market Development Action Plan. This will include market development for food waste and other organics. MassDEP expects to publish our initial Recycling Market Development Action Plan shortly.

Evaluation and Assessment

MassDEP will continue to gather and utilize several sources of data to evaluate progress towards our waste reduction goals, including:

- Annual reports from facilities that accept food materials for donation, animal feed, composting or anaerobic digestion.
- Waste characterization data that is prepared every three years. The next data set will be 2025 data available in spring 2026.
- Hauler data on the number of customers receiving separate food waste collection.
- Food waste reduction data provided by food waste reduction system providers.
- Municipally reported data on food waste reduction and diversion.
- Data from technical assistance provided through RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts.
- MassDEP waste ban inspection and enforcement data.

Plan Structure

This plan is divided into six sections:

1. Preventing Food Waste at the Source
2. Food Donation and Rescue
3. Food Diversion from Large Generators
4. Food Diversion from Medium Generators
5. Food Diversion from Small Businesses and Residents
6. Infrastructure and Market Development

1. Preventing Food Waste at the Source

Many businesses and institutions have opportunities to reduce wasted food through more efficient food service operations. However, businesses need better information to identify these opportunities. There is also an opportunity to reduce wasted food from consumers through leveraging education and outreach initiatives.

| Actions | Status | Notes |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Promote food waste reduction strategies at schools through the Massachusetts Green Team program, including the Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's guidance on Share Tables provided through the Office for Food and Nutrition Programs | Ongoing | |
| Develop guidance on reducing food waste for businesses and institutions | Completed | Review & update as needed |
| Provide technical assistance to businesses and institutions through RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts | Ongoing | |
| Track food waste reduction achieved through food waste tracking systems and promote use of food waste tracking systems by businesses and institutions | Ongoing | Began in 2019 |
| Support efforts to update and standardize food dating labels | Planned | Mass Local Food Action Plan recommendation |
| Assess opportunities to support food waste prevention strategies through Waste Reduction and Recycling Innovations Grant program | Planned | Will connect with the Recycling Market Development Action Plan |
| Leverage and share consumer focused food waste reduction campaigns through municipalities and Recycle Smart program | Planned | Includes EPA Too Good to Waste, Save the Food |
| Partner with supermarkets and other food retailers to provide guidance to consumers on purchasing strategies to reduce wasted food | Planned | |

2. Food Donation and Rescue

In some cases, businesses divert food to composting, anaerobic digestion, or animal feed, when that food may still be high quality food that is safe to donate and serve to people. Businesses, food donation organizations, and local health officials need transparent guidance to ensure that this food can be donated safely and effectively.

| Action | Status | Notes |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Develop guidance to inform and ensure sound and safe food donation practices by businesses and institutions | Completed | Developed with state and local public health officials |
| Provide technical assistance to businesses and institutions through RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts | Ongoing | |
| Provide targeted grants to food recovery organizations through SMRP, RBDG and Reuse Micro-Grants. Also promote funding opportunities available through other state and federal agencies. | Ongoing | RBDG collection grants |
| Implement a State tax credit for farmers and others who donate surplus food. | Planned | Mass Local Food Action Plan recommendation, would require legislative action |
| Research and share models for financial incentives and service fees to ensure more sustainable revenues for food donation organizations | Planned | Mass Local Food Action Plan recommendation |
| Increase refrigerated storage capacity at food pantries to allow food pantries to accept more donations of fresh, perishable foods. Promote other funding sources or consider how MassDEP grants could support this action. | Ongoing | Mass Local Food Action Plan recommendation, includes Reuse Micro Grant to pilot |

3. Food Diversion from Large Generators

Large Generators are defined as generators producing 1 ton or more per week. These entities have been subject to MassDEP's waste ban since 2014.

| Actions | Status | Notes |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Develop sector specific best management practices for organics collection programs | In process | Developed for restaurants, will modify for other sectors as needed |
| Technical assistance from RecyclingWorks to larger generators to meet new threshold and divert more material | Ongoing | |
| Support technology development such as de-packaging systems through RBDG grants and recycling loan fund | Ongoing | |
| Conduct waste ban inspections and enforcement | Ongoing | |
| Request for Information letters on waste ban compliance status to generators | Ongoing, as needed | |
| Provide information on on-site food waste systems for use by larger generators | Completed | |

4. Food Diversion from Medium Generators

Medium Size Generators are defined as generators producing 0.5-0.99 tons per week. These entities are subject to the waste disposal ban effective November 1, 2022.

| Actions | Status | Notes |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Implement regulations to establish 0.5 ton per week threshold for commercial organics disposal ban – to be effective November 1, 2022 | Completed | |
| Update food waste density mapping study – This will identify Business sectors, types and numbers of generators potentially subject to the lowered ban threshold. | Completed | MassDEP can share aggregate business data, but specific business data is proprietary and can't be shared publicly. This data is used for internal program planning purposes. |
| Work with the Lead by Example Program to quantify current food waste diversion by State facilities. Also gather sector-based information on how to advance organics diversion at colleges/universities, hospitals, corrections, convention centers. | Ongoing | Ongoing |
| Provide technical assistance from RecyclingWorks to medium size generators to meet new threshold and divert more material | Ongoing | |
| Conduct outreach to notify business sectors potentially subject to the reduced waste ban threshold | Ongoing | |
| Review and approve updated Solid Waste Facility Waste Ban Compliance Plans | Completed | |

5. Food Diversion from Small Businesses and Residents

Small generators are defined as generators producing less than 0.5 ton per week, including both businesses and residents.

| Actions | Status | Notes |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Develop multi-pronged strategy to divert food waste from small generators | Ongoing | |
| Work with regional groups, municipalities, and local business organizations to develop small generator collection hubs on the local level | Ongoing | |
| Support efforts to collect organics from residential sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer grants to municipalities for pilot collections and equipment for collection or drop-off sites • Continue to offer and encourage technical and financial assistance for backyard composting bin distribution and guidance | Ongoing | Ongoing |
| Provide technical assistance to support small scale composting at community gardens, particularly in Environmental Justice communities. | Ongoing | Delivered through RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts Compost Site Technical Assistance program |
| Consider ways to support composting at community gardens, particularly in Environmental Justice communities, through MassDEP’s Sustainable Materials Recovery Program grants | Planned | Develop for 2023 grant application |

6. Infrastructure and Market Development

Massachusetts has extensive infrastructure to accept and process food materials, particularly in the form of farm-based anaerobic digestion facilities (much more than is currently generated on a statewide basis.) Infrastructure to accept food waste is also growing in neighboring states, including Connecticut, Maine, New York, and Rhode Island. However, there is still some need for more outlets in certain parts of the state. This could include intermediate processing facilities or small compost operations. MassDEP also views food rescue and donation as part of our infrastructure, but those actions are included in Section 2 above.

| Actions | Status | Notes |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Continue to award loans through the Recycling Loan Fund and grants through the Recycling Industry Reimbursement Credit Grant Programs | Ongoing | |
| Include market development needs for food scraps and other organic materials in development of the Massachusetts Recycling Market Development Action Plan | Draft Plan Completed | Expect to publish Final Plan shortly |
| Work with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) and other state agencies to promote use of compost in construction and maintenance projects | Ongoing | |
| Through facility permits as well as compliance assistance with generators, ensure that facilities accepting source separated food materials are minimizing and properly managing any contaminants | Ongoing | |
| Provide technical assistance to support small scale composting at community gardens, particularly in Environmental Justice communities. | Ongoing | Technical assistance delivered through RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts program |
| Host composting workshops and deliver compost site technical assistance through RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts | Ongoing | |
| Support growth and improvement in agricultural composting through the Department of Agricultural Resources Agricultural Composting Improvement Grant Program | Ongoing | |
| Assess market outlets for materials generated by anaerobic digestion facilities such as the solid and liquid digestate. | Planned | |
| Consider regulatory changes needed to facilitate further development of organics infrastructure in Massachusetts | In process | Anticipate draft revised regulations in 2024 |