



Massachusetts  
Department  
of  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION

# fact sheet

## Food Waste Composting

Composting is a process that turns organic material, such as food waste, leaf and yard waste, and waxed cardboard, into a soil enrichment amendment. Diverting these materials from disposal facilities reduces the amount of waste going to landfills and incinerators and conserves natural resources.

### **How much food waste is generated in Massachusetts?**

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) estimates that food waste accounts for more than 25 percent of the waste stream in Massachusetts after recycling, or over 1 million tons per year. Sources of food waste generation include industrial facilities such as food processors and manufacturers; other commercial facilities such as supermarkets, restaurants, and colleges; and residents.

### **How much food waste is being diverted from disposal?**

The U.S. EPA and MassDEP estimate that less than 10 percent of food waste is currently diverted from disposal. A portion of this food waste is being diverted through methods other than composting, such as food donation and sending food waste to animal feed operations, industrial uses, and anaerobic digestion facilities. For example, quality surplus food from supermarkets and restaurants can be rescued by food banks and other food rescue organizations to aid food insecure people across the state.

There are currently about 30 permitted composting and anaerobic digestion operations accepting food materials in Massachusetts, with a combined permitted capacity to accept nearly 150,000 tons of organic material per year. However, the passage of the Massachusetts' commercial organic materials waste ban and available state-funding sources indicate strong opportunities for growth in Massachusetts' composting industry.

### **What is DEP doing to promote food waste composting?**

In the *Massachusetts 2010-2020 Solid Waste Master Plan*, DEP set goals of reducing total solid waste disposal by 30 percent and diverting at least 35 percent of source separated organics from disposal by 2020. MassDEP estimates that reaching the 2020 goal for food waste diversion will require over 350,000 tons per year of additional diversion activity as well as additional organics processing capacity sufficient to handle up to 300,000 tons per year of source separated organic materials. MassDEP is taking a number of steps toward meeting these objectives, including:

- **Composting Capacity.** MassDEP supports the development of composting and anaerobic digestion facilities through targeted grants and loans. MassDEP also provides technical assistance and training to composting and other organics processing facilities to process organic materials more effectively and reduce nuisance impacts.
- **Collection Routes.** MassDEP works with interested haulers to find efficient means to collect food waste from generators. The agency has developed a food waste generator density [map](#) and [database](#), allowing haulers and other interested parties to find food waste generators in specified geographic areas.

- **Source Separation.** MassDEP funds direct food waste diversion assistance to businesses and institutions through the RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts program. RecyclingWorks provides a hotline service and direct technical assistance, as well as online guidance, case studies, and the Find-A-Recycler database. In addition, MassDEP works with cities and towns across the state to pilot new approaches for collecting source separated organics from residents and small businesses.
- **End Markets.** MassDEP works with the Massachusetts Highway Department and the Operational Services Division to create state agency demand for finished compost.
- **Regulations.** MassDEP regulates compost facilities to ensure that they function in an environmentally sound manner. MassDEP established a commercial organic material waste ban that applies to businesses and institutions generating one ton or more of food waste in one week, effective October 2014.

### What permits do composting facilities need to operate in Massachusetts?

Regulatory requirements for composting and anaerobic digestion facilities vary depending on facility type and size. The requirements are established in the MassDEP Site Assignment Regulations (310 CMR 16) and include performance standards for specific types of facilities. Currently registered compost sites will need to certify to MassDEP and will be regulated either under a general permit or through a recycling, composting, or conversion (RCC) permit, depending on the facility size and feedstock.

- **General Permit.** Some recycling, composting, and aerobic or anaerobic digestion operations qualify for a general permit as long as they meet specific performance and capacity specifications. (See 310 CMR 16.04.) Municipal and commercial sites must register with MassDEP and agricultural sites must register with MassDEP or the Department of Agricultural Resources. Operations qualifying for a general permit do not require site assignments, but must notify local boards of health upon registration and submit an annual certification.
- **Recycling, Composting, or Conversion Permit.** Facilities handling recyclable or organic materials that do not qualify for an exemption or a general permit must apply for a Recycling, Composting, or Conversion Facility (RCC) permit from MassDEP. (See 310 CMR 16.05.) An RCC operation does not require a solid waste facility site assignment.

### How can I learn more?

Visit MassDEP's [website](#) for composting resources and information on regulations and funding sources

View a [map and list](#) of permitted food residual processors

View the full MassDEP [Site Assignment Regulations](#)

Visit the [RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts](#) website

Visit MassDEP's web page on [anaerobic digestion](#)

Massachusetts Department of  
Environmental Protection  
One Winter Street  
Boston, MA 02108-4746

Commonwealth of  
Massachusetts  
Charles D. Baker, Governor

Executive Office of  
Environmental Affairs  
Matthew A. Beaton, Secretary

Department of  
Environmental Protection  
Martin Suuberg Commissioner

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alternate format by calling our  
ADA Coordinator at  
(617) 574-6872.

