

Organics Subcommittee Meeting Summary
March 19, 2019 - 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
MassDEP, One Winter Street, Boston, MA

John Fischer of MassDEP provided an introductory presentation that summarized food waste reduction progress to date and framed program strategies looking forward. This presentation is posted along with this meeting summary on the [MassDEP web site](#). The majority of the meeting involved discussion on developing a comprehensive strategy to support a reduced threshold for the commercial organics waste disposal ban.

Questions and comments

Q: How does the development of the lower ban threshold relate to the development of the Draft 2030 Master Plan?

A: The ban and the Draft Master Plan are moving forward on parallel tracks. MassDEP expects that a proposal for a lower ban threshold will be part of the Draft Master Plan. However, like the development of the original commercial organics waste ban, MassDEP will develop a more detailed Organics Action Plan to support a reduced ban threshold. The development of this Organics Action Plan will proceed as MassDEP works on preparing the Draft 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan. MassDEP expects that the process of developing the regulations and supporting strategies for a reduced ban threshold will take at least two years.

Q: Is compost capacity fully utilized now?

A: For the most part yes, but the permitted composting capacity is not as clearly defined as anaerobic digestion (AD) capacity. It is a mix of on-farm composting sites and commercial/municipal sites.

Q: What was the percentage of food waste in MSW before 2014?

A: The percentage was similar to what it is today: it has not gone down as a percentage of overall trash. Some indirect factors might be influencing the number, but regardless, there is still a large amount of food waste in the trash and food waste represents the largest portion of both commercial and residential MSW by a significant margin.

Q: Has total disposal tonnage increased?

A: There was a drop in disposal from 2008-2010 and disposal has leveled off since then.

Q: Can a municipal yard waste composting facility also get a permit to take in food waste?

A: Yes, that would be allowed under a general permit from MassDEP.

Q: If a municipal compost operation decides to accept food waste with yard waste, would that create a seasonal problem?

A: The community would have to keep seasonal considerations in mind when taking food waste and leaves and yard waste to ensure that they have sufficient carbon materials to mix with food waste on a year round basis. Municipalities could talk to RecyclingWorks or MassDEP for advice.

C: Haulers already work with compost operations to adjust the amount of food waste being delivered on a week to week basis. This means that haulers need to work with multiple compost operations to ensure that sufficient capacity is available.

C: Food and yard waste co-collection is not operationally good for composters, as it can be more challenging to manage this material when mixed together in loads.

Q: Does the ban apply to single locations of chain companies?

A: The ban applies per location, not per company. However, if a college or hospital has one campus, but multiple points of food waste generation within that campus, that is considered to be one entity. The Q&A Document that MassDEP prepared for the 2014 ban can be found [here](#).

Q: Does the calculation for schools cover food brought in or just food prepared on site?

A: The number includes all food waste from a school, which would include food waste from lunches brought from home as well as from food prepared and served at the school.

C: It is hard to find locations on the South Shore that take in food waste. Most facilities only take animal feed, or they have other limitations.

A: Different facilities take different mixtures of material, and they may be full on any given day. For this reason, MassDEP believes that some additional capacity may be needed on a local or regional basis to support food waste diversion from smaller sources. Developing more options to deliver food material to would help lower collection and hauling costs.

C: Enforcement of the existing waste ban is still lacking.

R: In addition to existing inspections and enforcement, MassDEP is working on rolling out something in between technical assistance and enforcement. MassDEP is sending letters to request more information on how much food waste businesses generate now and how they are complying with the commercial organics waste ban. MassDEP intends to conduct more of this type of compliance work, combined with solid waste facility inspections, delivering technical assistance through RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts, and general outreach and awareness about waste bans.

Q: Does food de-packaging happen at composting or AD facilities or at separate locations?

A: De-packaging happens in a couple of different ways. One is an intermediate facility where the waste is de-packaged and then sent to either AD, compost, or animal feed operations. The second approach is where a de-packaging facility is located on site at an AD facility.

Q: Is there a vision for more intermediate capacity growth?

A: Yes, MassDEP expects that this intermediate capacity will continue to grow, especially in the Greater Boston area. However, there are economic and operational considerations as more handling of food material can increase costs. In order to effectively deliver material to compost and AD facilities as well as address contamination in food material streams, MassDEP expects that some additional intermediate processing capacity will develop over time.

Q: Will the lower threshold consider the GHG emissions associated with the change? In less dense areas, it could increase hauling activity and associated emissions.

A: Generally, trucking is not as much of a GHG contributor as people think. However, making collection and hauling as efficient as possible will provide both economic and environmental benefits.

C: The city of Boulder has a commercial organics ban, and this year they are starting a self-reporting component. This includes taking pictures of how businesses set up collection areas. The compliance/enforcement team then goes out to inspect the collection areas.

C: The list of new generators will likely include mid-size chain restaurants with national account managers.

R: There needs to be a similar dialogue as the first time that includes businesses, haulers, operators, trade association and others to ensure that businesses are aware of the development of the reduced ban threshold and are able effectively comply.

C: MassDEP needs to look further at the calculations behind the generator estimates.

R: MassDEP expects to provide further information on generator estimates at future Organics Subcommittee meetings and would welcome additional data in this area.

Q: What categories of grocery stores exist? Do smaller stores belong to the Massachusetts Food Association or the Massachusetts Convenience Store Association?

A: Most of the smaller stores are independent and not members of either group. Grocery stores typically fall into categories based on square footage measurements.

C: Food manufacturers and distributors are missing from the list of generator estimates.

R: The reason they are not listed is because MassDEP does not have sector-based estimates for this sector. However MassDEP realizes that many of these businesses do generate large quantities of food waste.

Q: What are the next concrete steps happening within the next 6 months?

A: MassDEP will work with the Organics Subcommittee to produce an updated Organics Action Plan that lays out potential issues and strategies to address them. MassDEP wants to hear questions/concerns/opportunities from stakeholders to put into the Action Plan. We expect that this will be completed by fall 2019.

C: The ½ ton per week number is still up for discussion, so long as we can ensure we have the capacity behind it. A third phase decrease is also open for discussion.

C: Some businesses that were subject to the 1 ton ban, but are now in compliance just under that threshold, would need to take additional steps to comply with a reduced ban threshold.

Q: What can advocacy organizations do at this point to help move the process forward?

A: The best step they can take is to continue to be active participants in the Organics Subcommittee discussions. MassDEP also requested that participants review the current Organics Action Plan and submit recommendations to MassDEP on strategies and initiatives to support implementation of a reduced ban threshold. The current plan is available [here](#).