

**Massachusetts Organics Subcommittee  
Meeting Summary  
March 24, 2020 10:00 am to 12:00 pm  
Held Via Webinar**

Massachusetts Agricultural Composting Program and Regulations, Sean Bowen, MassDAR

Sean Bowen from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) presented on the Agricultural Composting Program and final regulatory changes for farm-based composting operations. Details are available on the MDAR website at: <https://www.mass.gov/agricultural-composting-program>.

Q: Is there a way to see what farms are accepting off-site material, and if a farm is looking to accept it, is there a way to link businesses that have material to those operations?

A: MDAR registered composters are not currently listed online. We are discussing that internally. Right now, it is up to farms to reach out to producers.

C: RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts (RecyclingWorks) is happy to take calls from businesses with compostable material or farms looking for compostable material. Their website is [www.recyclingworksma.com](http://www.recyclingworksma.com) and the hotline number is 888-254-5525.

C: The RecyclingWorks website has a searchable service provider database for any material, including food material. The MassDEP website also has a list of operations, including composters, anaerobic digesters, and animal feed operations, willing to accept food materials.

Q: Do you have a sense that these regulations will push material from composting to other management approaches?

A: No, what we're hoping is that these regulations get composters to better manage material, through volume restrictions and better control over the process so facilities maintain their carbon/nitrogen and wet/dry material balance to avoid nuisance conditions.

Q- How many farms are registered with MassDAR as agricultural composters?

A: 52 farms are registered with MDAR statewide. There are other farms composting that are not registered, as they only need to register if they are accepting materials from off site. Some other operations are registered with MassDEP. Some are too small, and some are unaware.

Q: Is there a prohibition from receiving feedstock out of state?

A: No there is not.

Q: Can the grant program set up new farm-based compost operations?

A: Originally, the grants were set up to assist farms already composting. New farm composting operations with a need are certainly eligible

Q: Can you speak more about the equipment buying grant?

A: The application period for the Agricultural Composting Improvement Program is closed. MassDAR is currently reviewing 34 applications. The intent is to facilitate on-farm composting

and use of compost on farms who need it. Stumbling blocks to farms using more compost include a lack of screeners and spreaders. Last year, we funded several of those.

Q: Are there on-farm anaerobic digestion facilities that generate biogas or CHP to sell to the electrical grid?

A: Yes. There are 12 anaerobic digesters in Massachusetts. Some are farm-based, and they generate electricity back to the grid.

C: The MassDEP website also lists anaerobic digesters in Massachusetts.

Q: Does “less than 10 cubic yards” or “less and less than 5 tons food waste per day” apply to post-consumer food waste from restaurants?

A: The new regulation limits each location to accepting 75 tons per week of Group 2 material, which includes all food material, including post-consumer food waste.

### Commercial Organics Waste Ban, Food Waste Data, and Organics Action Plan, John Fischer, MassDEP

John Fischer from MassDEP provided a presentation on the proposed modification to the Massachusetts Waste Bans that would change the threshold for the food waste disposal ban to businesses generating ½ ton of food waste or more per week. The presentation included background information on food waste reduction, disposal and generation, along with the draft updated Organics Action Plan.

Q: How does MassDEP plan to address highest and best-use organics diversion? If there is reported excess capacity to process food waste (commingled with sewage in wastewater treatment anaerobic digestion) don't we risk underdevelopment of infrastructure to produce higher quality, soil-replenishing composted material?

A: With the current food waste ban, MassDEP does not favor any one aspect of the food waste hierarchy, but rather encourages businesses to comply in whatever way works best for them. We are not dictating where food material goes and how it is diverted. We will support any compliant approach to diverting food material from disposal to comply with the ban.

Q: Food rescue to food banks should be a top priority. However the system has difficulties - not the least of which is disposal of food that expires while (food banks) are trying to distribute it. This disposal cost is not in their budget. Are there programs planned to help with this cost so composters and anaerobic digestion facilities can assist food banks with this dynamic of “the more they accept, the more they may need to dispose of?”

A: MassDEP is open to suggestions for how other entities can work collaboratively with food donation and food rescue organizations, including shared funding models. We have developed best management practices through the RecyclingWorks program to help businesses work effectively with food donation and food rescue organizations and ensure that the food they donate is safe and does not need to be disposed of.

Q: How is COVID-19 impacting food donation?

A: This is a very timely question. RecyclingWorks recently posted a blog post about these issues, concerns and opportunities. Businesses and institutions with extra food materials due to closures are encouraged to donate food, as need for food donation is especially high right now. Food donation organizations have developed COVID-19 protocols – businesses should contact them directly for more details on how to handle donations.