



# Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Fact Sheet

## Municipal Food Waste Diversion Models

The Massachusetts [Solid Waste Master Plan](#) sets a goal of reducing food waste going to landfills by 750,000 tons a year by 2030. Municipal, residential, and small business food waste programs will be critical in meeting this goal. Municipalities can use a variety of approaches to help prevent food loss and divert food waste from the trash. As of 2025, municipalities in Massachusetts are preventing almost **24,000 tons of food scraps** from going to landfills or incinerators annually. There are **109 communities in Massachusetts that offer their residents one or more options** to drop off their food scraps at a central location or in a bin at home that is picked up curbside.

According to MassDEP's most recent [recycling and solid waste survey data](#):

- 10 municipalities collect food waste at both curbside and drop-off locations.
- 14 municipalities contract with a hauler or composting company via a municipal contract for full curbside service to all eligible households.
- 5 municipalities contract with a private hauler to operate as a Preferred Vendor to provide curbside food waste to households that opt into the program.
- 80 municipalities collect food waste at a local drop-off location.
- 157 municipalities sell [backyard compost bins](#) to residents.
- Many additional municipalities promote a private subscription service, but do not negotiate a contract or provide financial incentives.



Curbside Cart



Municipal Food Waste Drop-off Site



Home Compost Bin

The following pages describe different models Massachusetts municipalities may follow to divert food scraps from the waste stream. Each model poses various benefits and challenges.

Municipalities may utilize one specific model, or a combination of models, depending on that city or town's specific resources and priorities.

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## Municipally Contracted Services

The municipality issues a request for proposals (RFP) and contracts with compost operators or haulers to provide curbside food waste service to all eligible households.

### Benefits:

- Municipality will be able to outline terms and cost of services.
- Potential to reach many residents, particularly if the fees for residents are low, wrapped in with other municipal service fees, or if the service is fully covered by the municipality and free to residents (e.g., tax-based).
- Municipality may fund through tax rolls or other funding sources.
- Municipality may see reduction in trash hauling and tipping costs overtime.

### Challenges:

- May have a higher initial cost for the municipality
  - Will require more administrative involvement from the municipality
  - Potential for higher contamination rate in the curbside bins as residents become accustomed to the process of separating food scraps and learn what is and is not compostable.
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## Preferred Vendor Model

The municipality negotiates a contract with a private hauler to serve residents that “opt in” with curbside pickup. Residents sign up for private food waste hauling service with the preferred vendor at a specific price that the municipality has contracted for, and the municipality promotes the service. The municipality may offer incentives for residents to sign up for service, such as free curbside carts, kitchen counter bins, or a subsidy towards subscription fees.

### Benefits:

- Low-cost option for municipalities.
- Implementation and management are handled by vendor.
- Contract may include lower subscription cost for residents, protection against price increases, and service terms.

**Challenges:**

- Municipality may need to invest in advertising or incentives.
- Vendor may require a minimum number of household subscriptions.
- Could limit competitive pricing with other private haulers.

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## Food Waste Drop Off Sites

Residents bring food scraps to a centrally located food waste collection bin, which the municipality arranges to have hauled to a compost facility.

**Benefits:**

- Effective, low cost, and low risk way to start residential food waste collection.
- Helps educate residents previously unfamiliar with food waste diversion.
- Variety of cost structures. Municipalities may charge a small fee to gain access to the bins or include it with a transfer station fee.
- Smaller municipalities may be able to manage and process food waste themselves, eliminating the need to move the material off-site, and provide finished compost to residents.
- Bins are available on [State Contract FAC113](#) at a pre-negotiated price.
- Great option for residents that do not have backyard space.

**Challenges:**

- Requires municipal management and oversight of bins.
- Bins may need to be locked to prevent misuse.
- Outreach and education are important to ensure residents know the availability of the service and understand the correct use.
- Requires additional effort from residents, particularly if they have curbside service for all other waste service.

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## Backyard Compost Bin Distribution

Municipalities supply at-cost or low-cost backyard compost bins to residents. The bins stay outside and, by mixing kitchen food scraps, leaves, twigs, paper, and other compostable materials, residents can make compost to use in the garden, in potted plants, or on their lawns.

### Benefits:

- Once purchased, backyard bins are free to use, easy to manage, and will create valuable compost for the homeowner or resident.
- Bins are available for purchase off [State Contract FAC113](#) at a pre-negotiated price.
- [Recycling Dividend Program \(RDP\)](#) funds can be used to purchase bins as well as counter-top kitchen scrap buckets.
- All food scraps are processed at home. No hauling is required.

### Challenges

- Residents require outdoor space to place the compost bin.
- Residents may [need outreach and education](#) on how to successfully separate food scraps and use the backyard bin, as well as what materials are able to be composted.

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## Private Subscription Service

Residents independently subscribe to a curbside food waste service with a private vendor.

### Benefits:

- No municipal cost or involvement.
- Vendor responsible for communicating, contracting, and billing.

### Challenges:

- Municipality has less involvement in negotiating the cost or quality of service.
- Cost for residents may be higher (or subject to more fluctuation) than if the municipality provides incentives or reaches a preferred vendor or contacted agreement with a vendor.
- Vendor may require a minimum number of subscriptions to provide service.

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Note: preventing food waste and food rescue activities are also important tools in keeping food out of our landfills. Prevention refers to producing, buying, and serving only what is needed. Food rescue is when edible food is redistributed or donated to nourish people. Most food waste prevention and food rescue activities happen further up the chain, on farms and in the manufacturing and business sectors. Municipalities, especially schools, can implement food waste prevention and food rescue programs and policies. For more information, [visit MassDEP's composting and organics website](#).

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