

# Organics Waste Disposal Ban Potential Proposed Approach



John Fischer  
Organics Subcommittee  
October 9, 2025

The background is a solid blue gradient. At the top, there are several overlapping, wavy lines in various shades of blue, creating a layered, wave-like effect. The word "Background" is written in a light blue, sans-serif font, positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image.

# Background

# The Broader Context

- Nationally 31% of food goes uneaten
- On average we spend \$782 per person for food not eaten
- In Massachusetts:
  - Dispose 900,000 tons of food waste/year in trash
  - 1 in 6 residents food insecure

# Goals and Capacity

- Food waste 21% of our trash - 930K tons/year
  - Estimate 510K tons commercial/420K tons residential
- 2025 waste characterization data available Spring 2026
- 2030 goal – increase annual diversion by 500K tons over 2018 baseline of 280K tons
  - 780K tons total
  - At 350K tons in 2024



# Goals and Capacity

- Waste Ban Expectations
  - 2014 ban - increase from 100k to 300k tons/year
  - 2022 ban - includes about 100K addl. tons/year
- Remainder may need to come from smaller sources
- Current management capacity – about 510K tons
- Need for more distributed capacity and expanded collection infrastructure
- Increasingly regional, inter-state capacity picture

# Commercial Organics Ban

## History

- Organics Action Plan – established 2012
- Initial Commercial Organics Waste Ban –2014
- Expanded Commercial Organics Waste Ban – 2022
- 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan – published 2021
  - “Conduct stakeholder process by 2025 to assess whether to ban all organic waste from disposal by 2030.”

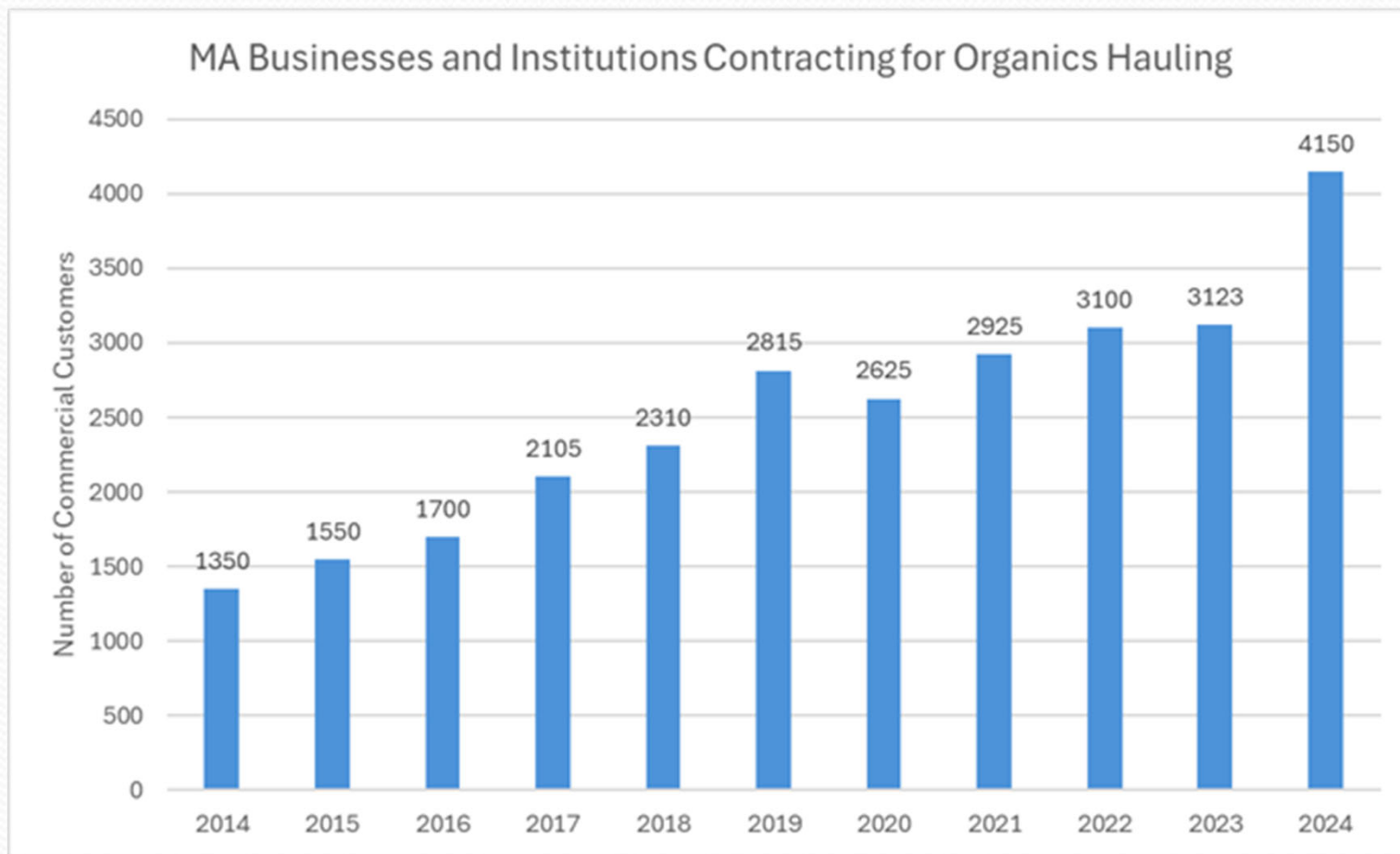


# Annual Food Waste Diversion

(total rounded to nearest 10K tons)

Type of Use	2016	2,017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Anaerobic Digestion	48,234	87,856	159,563	187,947	211,215	175,264	217,180	249,284	245,620
Compost	79,586	52,991	42,321	40,569	33,038	25,273	28,651	26,499	21,247
Animal Feed	26,250	26,777	39,593	40,014	8,828	24,719	43,033	43,820	34,052
Food Donation	22,712	25,940	26,637	27,703	30,004	23,591	22,085	21,020	23,555
Other	13,277	12,819	8,065	9,552	38,745	27,295	30,822	31,845	25,060
Rounded Total	190,000	210,000	280,000	310,000	320,000	280,000	340,000	370,000	350,000

# Food Waste Hauler Customers





# Food Waste Prevention Data

Date Reported	Total MA Commercial Customers	New Annual Food Waste Prevented	Total Annual Food Waste Prevented
FY19 (all time)	145 customers	1,025	1,025
FY20 (1 year)	154 customers	448	1,473
FY21 (1 year)	296 customers	169	1,642
FY22 (1 year)	447 customers	437	2,079
FY23 (1 year)	576 customers	640	2,719
FY24 (1 year)	531 customers	714	3,433
FY25 (1 year)	716 customers	763	4,196
Total Food Waste Prevented (All Time):			16,567 tons to date

# Current Management Capacity

- Anaerobic Digestion – 360,000 tons
- Composting – 90,000 tons
  - *Note: Operating at much smaller scale and reporting may be incomplete*
- Animal Feed – 30,000 tons
  - *Note: Food scraps going to farms for feed may be under reported*
- Donation/Rescue – 30,000 tons
- Total – 510,000 tons
  - *Note: Does not include out of state facilities*



# Available Current Capacity

- Gap of about 160,000 tons between current diversion and estimated capacity
- Current AD facilities
  - 80-100K
- Composting
  - Permitted/allowable vs. operational capacity
- Animal feed
  - Additional capacity but farms difficult to determine
- Food donation and rescue – able to accept more donated food





# Additional Capacity Need

- 2030 goal – 780,000 tons total food waste diversion
- Total additional statewide capacity needed by 2030 – 270,000 tons
- More distributed capacity to reduce transportation distances from more smaller sources
  - small businesses and residents

# Residential Food Scraps Collection

- Municipal programs
  - 160 municipalities report some type of food waste collection program
    - 82 drop-off
    - 14 curbside
    - 9 both
    - 55 have preferred vendor for food waste collection
  - Collected 21,882 tons of food waste in 2024
  - 160 municipalities sell home compost bins to residents
- Green Team equipment to schools
  - Distributed compost bins to 140 schools for small on-site composting programs

# Transition to Action Plan



# Factors Driving a Program Shift

- Solid waste disposal capacity severely limited
- Food waste diversion progress leveled off last 3 years
- Need for more effective enforcement at ½ ton per week ban threshold
- Estimated available capacity – 160,000 tons
- Need and opportunity for more diversion
- Spur continued capacity growth going forward
- Continue to encourage more food donation & rescue

# Factors to Consider for Potential Expanded Waste Ban

- Effectiveness of voluntary programs
- Cost-effectiveness of collection from smaller sources
- Ability of infrastructure to manage additional materials
- Potential increased contamination from small businesses and residents
- MassDEP ability to inspect and enforce effectively

# Potential Proposed Approach for Discussion



# Potential Stage 1 Expansion

- Stage 1 – on or after November 1, 2028
- Lower Commercial Organics Ban threshold to zero
- Consider exemption for businesses with incidental food waste (e.g., offices with lunch-room waste, medical offices, non-food retail, etc.)
- Would most likely include all schools (assuming have a cafeteria)

# Potential Stage 2 Expansion

- Stage 2 – no sooner than November 1, 2030
- Expand ban to include residential food waste
- Establish municipal compliance program standard
- Municipalities with specified program would be considered compliant
- Could include curbside, drop-off, home compost bin and/or subscription service options
- May vary for curbside and drop-off programs
- Eligibility requirements may increase over time



# How would ban implementation work in practice?

- Inspections at solid waste facilities
- No allowable disposal amount in regulations
- Consider action levels – like cardboard, bottles & cans
- Solid waste facilities use action levels for implementation purposes – e.g., 10% for cardboard
- MassDEP considers action levels but may enforce below action level in certain scenarios



# How would ban implementation work in practice?

- Issue enforcement for significant amounts of banned materials
- As with other materials – would not enforce against individuals or for minimal quantities
- But, would not require knowing exactly how much from each generator



# Supporting Programs: Capacity

- Recycling Business Development Grants
  - For capital costs
  - Past grants up to \$400,000
  - Now finalizing Fall 2025 application
  - Considering larger grants for food materials







# Supporting Programs: Capacity

- Recycling Loan Fund
  - Open for applications on ongoing basis – up to \$500,000
  - Up to \$1.5 million for anaerobic digestion





# Supporting Programs: Capacity

- Recycling Works in Massachusetts
  - Compost site technical assistance
- Waste Reduction Innovations Grant
  - Accepted proposals for start up and pilot projects for food waste in 2025
  - Will consider for larger capital projects for food materials in next cycle

# Supporting Programs: Businesses

- Recycling Works in Massachusetts
  - Web-based resources and guidance
  - Email and phone assistance
  - On-site assistance
  - Outreach
    - Speaking at meetings
    - Exhibiting at conferences
    - Newsletter and blog posts







# Supporting Programs: Schools

- Green Team
  - Educational programs
  - Small equipment grants
- RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts technical assistance
- Green Sword Workgroup
- MassDEP Grants for Schools
  - SMRP – expanding equipment grants for schools – carts, collection containers, equipment



# Supporting Programs: Municipal/Residential

- SMRP Equipment Grants
  - Food waste collection carts
  - Food waste drop off equipment
  - Organics Capacity Grants – larger projects





# Supporting Programs: Municipal/Residential

- Recycling Dividends Program (RDP) Funding
  - Municipalities earn up to 3 points for food waste programs
  - Municipalities earned \$320,000 in RDP funds in 2024 from implementing organics programs
  - From 2021 to 2024, municipalities spent \$865,000 of RDP funds on food waste programs

# Next Steps

- Obtain feedback on proposed approach
- Engage stakeholders to participate in process
- Hold follow up meetings to work on specific issues
- Develop refined proposal and updated Action Plan
- Develop draft regulations and guidance
  - Would need to go through public comment & hearings
- Promulgate final regulations
- Implement ban and supporting programs





# Contact Information

- John Fischer – [john.fischer@mass.gov](mailto:john.fischer@mass.gov)