



TOMMY'S COMPOST SERVICE

Case Study

MAY 2025

BACKGROUND

Launched in 2021 by founder and CEO Mary Summers, Tommy's Compost Service (TCS) is a woman-owned and single-parent operated food waste collection service for residential and commercial entities in Berkshire County. Serving over 18 towns and cities, TCS seeks to make a measurable impact on the community and fight for a sustainable future. Their primary mission is to help homes and businesses throughout the Berkshires compost their food waste and generate nutrient-dense soil, so the community can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support local food systems. To do so, TCS provides a unique and comprehensive composting experience so that people can confidently add composting into their routine.

MEET TOMMY AND MARY!

The face of Tommy's Compost Service is an adorable toddler named Thomas, Mary's son! Tommy tags along on composting adventures with his mom, who he enjoys helping! Mary's business is aptly named after Thomas because she is fighting against climate change, working to establish a safer and healthier planet for him through her composting business. A former middle school science teacher, Mary began her work in the climate sector as an intern for Mass Audubon and as a Commissioner for the Becket Conservation Commission. From there, she became the Program Manager for her non-profit pilot, the Berkshire Zero Waste Initiative. There she worked with local communities, schools, and networks within Berkshire County to reduce waste, increase access to composting services, and host zero-waste workshops. Working in these spaces for years led her to realize that her community lacked sufficient composting services. So, after years of effort to get existing composting businesses to expand and fill this vacuum, Mary decided to take up this mantle herself. And Tommy's Compost Service was born. She takes pride in being a mother and doing this work for a greater purpose. For her, Tommy represents the future, the next generation that does not deserve the climate crisis they are born into.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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[Tommy's Compost Service](#)

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[Recycling and Reuse Business Development Program](#)

BUSINESS OVERVIEW:

Residential Composting Pick-Up Services:

- Conduct scheduled curbside pickup of food waste throughout Berkshire County.
- Provide residents with one or two 5-gallon buckets to collect food scraps which are emptied on their designated pick-up day and transported to a local compost operation.
- Residential Curbside Plans:
 - Weekly Pick-Up - \$31/month (typically for households of 3+ people).
 - Biweekly Pick-Up - \$21/month (for households of 1-2 people).

Commercial/Business Composting Pick-Up Services:

- Conduct weekly food waste pick-up of the provided 32-gallon, 48-gallon, and/or 64-gallon carts.
- Service is efficient and tailored to the specific needs of the business.
- Work with businesses to efficiently integrate composting into their business model and to ensure that their outdoor receptacles are appropriate for their location.
- Plans: have a range of plans for businesses to choose from (average monthly cost for restaurants and smaller operations-\$72).

Composting Pick-Up Services for Events:

- Serve weddings, festivals, road races, sports events and more.
- Provide drop-off and pick-up of 32-64 gallon size carts for food waste collection (120-240+ pound capacity).
- Deliver carts directly to the event location, customers place them wherever they would like, and TCS picks them up at the end of the event.

MASSDEP RECYCLING & REUSE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT (RBDG):

- As TCS is a woman/mom-owned business, Summers struggled to receive resources, particularly from banks, which denied her funding. These financial institutions require a co-signor for young business loan applications, which was out of reach for Summers since she was not only a single-member LLC, but also a single parent. These hurdles challenged Summers as she planned the longevity and impact of her business, until she applied for MassDEP's RBDG funding. MassDEP's support of TCS, through the RBDG grant, has proved vital for long-term growth and development of Tommy's Compost.



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- MassDEP awarded Tommy's Compost Service **two RBDG grants**. The **2022 grant** was used to purchase a Ford F-350 truck with a waste disposal dump unit and cart lifter, allowing Summers to greatly accelerate the success of her business. Summers was also awarded a **second grant in 2024** that has yet to be implemented, which will be put towards collection equipment to enable TCS to continue to increase their food waste collection.

RESULTS:

Collected and converted...

- **1 million pounds (250 tons)** of organic waste between July of 2021 through December of **2024**.
- **1.2 million pounds** of organic waste into compost to date and is projected to reach the **2 million pounds** mark by the end of **2025**.

EXPANSION AND DEVELOPMENT ASPIRATIONS:

- Increased Collection: expected to reach **3 million pounds** of organic waste collected and converted by **2026** with a minimum of **1 million pounds annually** thereafter.
- Expansion of the Team: **Mary works full-time** single-handedly managing Tommy's and conducting the pick-ups and drop-offs. A community member, **Eric, volunteers part time** to lend additional support. As the business continues to grow, the work has become too much for one person to bear alone. Thus, Mary expects to eventually divert the physical labor away from herself and gain **4 full-time drivers** to conduct pick-ups and drop-offs.
- Expansion of the Fleet: the increased annual tonnage of waste diverted will require more vehicles so as not to put a strain on one truck. **The RBDG grant funding has already gone towards growing the fleet**. So, Mary **expects to eventually acquire 2 new trucks in 2025 to meet TCS' growing need** so that her business will not entirely rely on her current truck.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND COMPOSTING

Tommy's Compost operates in the Berkshires, rural western Massachusetts, which is home to several communities with environmental justice populations. According to the state, for a community to be defined as an environmental justice (EJ) population, it must meet at least one of these three criteria: minority populations, low median household income, or limited English proficiency. Certain regions in the Berkshires, particularly Pittsfield, have been identified as an EJ population because the median household income is significantly lower than the statewide average. Pittsfield is the largest city in Berkshire County, and Tommy's Compost has worked with many people in the downtown Pittsfield area. However, those in the area have cited cost and space availability as hurdles to implementing composting. Whether it be backyard composting, vermicomposting, or

dropping off their compost at a given location, there are significant costs for the average consumer associated with it. From start-up costs to travel burdens, these issues have made it difficult for Mary to access her customer base within EJ populations.

Mary has been working diligently to come up with solutions to bridge this gap. She partnered with the Pittsfield Farmers Market (PFM), a market event that is open every Saturday from 9 am -1 pm, to offer a free compost drop-off while the market is open. They decided on this location due to the high use of SNAP benefits, which are doubled, and many EJ community population members utilize this local market to buy their groceries. Mary and the PFM have acquired and used grant funds to provide countertop bins to those who want to drop off their compost at the site. This allows them to put their food waste in a receptacle that is easy to travel with. Thus far, this initiative has been successful in that it has received no complaints from the community or the city. However, the bin generates approximately the same amount of food waste 10 households would every week, meaning that the reach remains limited. Another potential solution that Mary has been considering is a compost drop-off at one of the local food pantries, which would be available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Mary is exploring all her options so she can bring composting to every inch of her community, no matter the disparity or difficulty. She continues to work with MassDEP's Director of Environmental Justice, Deneen Simpson, and the department's Community Engagement Manager in the Western Regional Office, Elizabeth Cardona, to ensure that composting is universally accessible in The Berkshires.

"Starting a food waste business was not what I imagined as my life's purpose until I realized that composting was the most effective way to make a significant dent in the climate crisis- for myself, my family, and the entire world. After that, I had no choice but to do the next right thing."

"If you're reading this and wondering if you should follow your passion for the environment: then you've already started the journey. Pick up the pen, connect with your community, and ask questions- that's how you'll forge your path to success."

- Mary Summers, CEO and Founder of Tommy's Compost Service