

Howard County Food Scrap and Yard Trim Composting Program

FACT SHEET

What is happening:

- Howard County is opening an \$800,000 pilot composting facility at the Alpha Ridge landfill in Marriottsville.
- Built to best-practice standards for odor and run-off control, the facility will process yard trim and food scraps, and turn it into a valuable commodity that will be sold on-site.
- The Alpha Ridge Composting Facility allows the county to double the size of its curbside collection program, which is the most extensive and most successful in the State of Maryland. Later this year, food scrap collection will be expanded so that 10,000 homes in Elkrigde and Columbia will be able to participate in the innovative program.
- Howard County estimates that 10,000 pounds of food scraps per week will soon be diverted from the waste stream.



Benefits of food scrap and yard trim recycling:

Saves money:

- The cost of disposing of residential household waste is \$41.50 per ton. A private contractor plans to charge Howard County \$65 per ton to haul food scrap and yard trim to a processing center in Delaware.
- By comparison, the net cost of transporting and processing food scraps and yard trim at the Howard County processing facility will be about \$38.50 per ton. (Net cost means cost of collections, transport and processing, minus revenues from sale of finished product.)
- Additionally, food scraps that are ground in residential garbage disposals and sent through the sanitary sewer system for processing are expensive to remove – costing about \$350 per ton.
- Food scrap collection will also raise public awareness about the amount of food that families throw away every year. Estimates show that U.S. families dispose of \$2,275 in food every year which they do not eat before it spoils.

(over for more)

Protects the environment:

- Potential to reduce household waste stream by 25 percent.
- Reduces greenhouse gases created when food scraps decompose in landfills and produce methane.
- Creates a valuable end-product and jobs: A study shows that composting creates twice as many jobs than landfills, and four times as many jobs as trash incinerators.
- The end product, compost, is a great soil amendment that returns nutrients to the soil, produces healthy plants, and reduces reliance on fossil-fuel based fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. Compost can also absorb four to five times its weight in water, reducing Chesapeake Bay run-off.

How it works:

- Residents provided with separate bin for fruits, vegetables, bread and baked goods, egg shells, pasta, rice, coffee grounds, tea bags, paper towels, pizza boxes.
- Not allowed: meat and fish; fats oils and grease; pet waste; diapers.
- Bin set out weekly, same day as yard trim pickup and regular recycling.
- Food scraps and yard waste taken to Composting Facility and debagged and put through grinder.
- The ground materials is placed in piles, with a state-of-the-art odor control system.
- Piles are covered and turned.
- In 75 days, end product is fully cured, stable, ready to be put on garden
- Compost to be sold for \$19/cubic yard; mulch will be sold for \$20/cubic yard and topsoil will be sold for \$23/cubic yard.
- Can accommodate 10,000 homes – with an estimated diversion of 10,000 pounds of food waste per week, based on current participation rates.