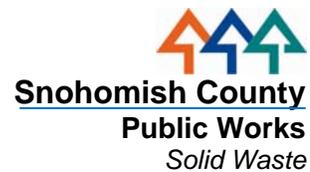




Snohomish County Food Scrap Collection Outreach 2007 - 2008

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Prepared by:



Polagaya McLaughlin
425-388-6592

Overview

The Snohomish County Public Works Solid Waste Division (SWD) received a coordinated prevention grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology to facilitate food scrap recycling programs at schools, businesses, and institutions that produced food waste in Snohomish County. Prior to 2006, there were neither routes nor facilities available to handle compostable food and kitchen scraps. After Cedar Grove Composting opened its Everett facility, commercial service was available but was little utilized in the county. The SWD requested funds to help make food scrap collection for composting viable in the county. The ultimate goal of the grant was to reduce the number of tons of compostable food scraps discarded as garbage and instead to divert those tons to recycling. This grant was for two calendar years, 2007 – 2008.

Throughout 2007, SWD, along with the recycling coordinators in Edmonds, Lynnwood, and Marysville, worked to identify possible participants for composting, discussed routes with haulers to ensure service, conducted initial outreach, and purchased incentives for program participants in the form of Slim Jim™ containers and compostable bags. Approximately 80 businesses were visited in 2007 and by the end of year 21 businesses were participating in food scrap recycling. Also, in 2007, arrangements were made for Cedar Grove Composting to run collection routes and provide participant trainings. This accomplished one of the main tasks in the grant: to establish food scrap recycling availability to businesses throughout the county.

In 2008, with service available in the county from north to south and as far east as Monroe, the SWD began the task of providing the incentives and assistance needed to get targeted entities to participate in food scrap recycling collection. The SWD contracted with Cascadia Consulting Group and sub consultant Blue Marble Environmental to facilitate implementing programs with four commercial sectors: K-12 schools, community colleges, large businesses and institutions, and small food service businesses. Tasks included finding contacts for large businesses, schools, and institutions, site visits to possible participants, diversion calculations and associated costs and savings, delivering bags and bins as incentives, technical assistance on set up, and training of participants. The SWD and Cedar Grove Composting participated on this work, as appropriate.

The consultant provided outreach to 425 schools, businesses, and institutions in 2008. Of these, 32 participants started food waste collection programs in 2008, with over 2,831 tons of waste diverted as a direct result of the outreach.¹ The consultant created outreach and promotional materials, conducted waste audits, and did on-site trainings and classroom presentations. The consultant documented on-site visits, bins and bags distributed, compost programs started, level of interest in composting, and tonnage diverted by food waste composting. In addition, Cedar Grove Composting provided staff to conduct on-site training and SWD designed and published advertising to inform possible participants about food scrap recycling.

¹ These figures include businesses that started service in the cities of Bothell, Lake Stevens, Mill Creek, Mountlake Terrace, Monroe, Mukilteo, Snohomish, and the western half of unincorporated Snohomish County, as well as a school in Marysville and an institution within the city of Everett.

The following sections summarize efforts and accomplishments for each sector (K-12 Schools, Community Colleges, Large Businesses and Institutions, and Small Food Service Businesses). Each section provides details on recruitment efforts, outreach, and outcomes. A final section offers lessons learned. Appendices provide outreach details, supporting data documentation, and samples of technical assistance provided to participants:

Appendix A: Summary of Overall Visits, Level of Interest by Geographic Area, Bins and Bags Distributed, and 2006-2008 Tonnages

Appendix B: Supporting Materials for School Outreach

Appendix C: Supporting Materials for Business Outreach.

Outreach

1. Outreach to K-12 Schools

1.1 Recruitment

The consultant recruited school districts to participate in the food waste collection program through a combination of direct contact with districts, leads provided by the SWD and Cedar Grove Composting, and a presentation at the regional Washington Association of Maintenance and Operations Managers (WAMOA) meeting in September 2008. These recruitment efforts resulted in establishing contacts from five school districts: Edmonds, Marysville, Snohomish, Monroe, and Arlington. Presenting at the WAMOA meeting resulted in the best response (three of the five).

1.2 Outreach

The consultant contacted the interested school districts (total of eight schools within the five districts), resulting in on-site meetings, waste audits, and diversion calculations for four schools. One school implemented food waste collection (Marysville Middle School). The on-site meetings included discussions with key individuals from the district and school, typically the district food service director, district custodial manager, school principal, head of the school kitchen, and school custodian. While on-site, the consultant determined current waste bin and outdoor container placement, noted space restrictions, and talked with the kitchen and custodial staff about possible food waste bin options. The consultant also asked each school and district to provide waste and recycling bills for the prior year. With this information, the consultant entered tonnage, volume, and cost data into a "waste calculator" (an interactive Excel spreadsheet tool) to estimate potential diversion and cost savings. All four schools that received a waste audit showed cost savings. The consultant presented results to the schools and respective districts for their review and decision on whether or not to proceed with a food collection program.

The Marysville School District proceeded with a pilot at Marysville Middle School. The Arlington School District wants to implement a program in 2009 at Presidents Elementary. The Edmonds School District wanted to give initial go-ahead in 2008 for its two schools with central kitchens (Lynnwood High and Alderwood Middle Schools) but decided to postpone. Table 1 summarizes the status of each school at the end of 2008.

Table 1: Status of School Outreach at End of 2008

School	School District	Status
Marysville Middle School	Marysville	Program implemented
Presidents Elementary	Arlington	Waste audit and diversion calculation presented; school district wants to proceed
Lynnwood High School	Edmonds	Waste audit and diversion calculation presented
Alderwood Middle School	Edmonds	Waste audit and diversion calculation presented
Hidden River Elementary	Monroe	Waste bills requested
Frank Wagner Elementary	Monroe	Expressed interest
Dutch Hill Elementary	Snohomish	Expressed interest
Centennial Middle School	Snohomish	Expressed interest

Prior to visiting Marysville Middle School, the custodian had won a grant to help start a food composting program, including purchasing enough compostable lunch trays to last two years, and was excited to launch the Snohomish County pilot program before the end of 2008. After an initial meeting with key individuals including the district’s Executive Director of Finance, the consultant worked with Cedar Grove Composting and representatives from the school and district to schedule the pilot kick-off date, set up and implement trainings for food service staff, and provide presentations and demonstrations to seven classrooms. Three collection stations were set up: two in the cafeteria and one in the student center. Each station includes a composting container (a Slim Jim™), a container for recycling, a container for garbage, a bucket for liquids, and a table where students can stack their compostable trays. Free bins and free compostable bags were provided to the school to get the program started.

In addition to active outreach to schools, the consultant created an educational resource guide for teachers and educators that pilot a food waste collection program. The resource guide consists of relevant curricula and internet links to resources on waste reduction, recycling, and composting. The resource guide will be accessible in PDF format from the Snohomish County website to all teachers and educators. Program managers from the Washington Green Schools (WAGS) program have also requested to provide the guide on the WAGS website.

1.3. Outcomes

Marysville Middle School diverted 6.6 tons of waste in the last quarter of 2008. In three months, the school went from collecting 38 bags of garbage per day to fewer than four bags. The lunchroom formerly generated 27 bags from nine garbage containers that were emptied after each of the three lunch periods; this was reduced to two partially full bags for the whole day. The student center reduced its garbage bags from 10-11 a day to 1.5 a day. Approximately half of the school’s student population was educated about food collection in one day.

2. Outreach to Community Colleges

2.1. Recruitment

The consultant contacted both Edmonds Community College and Everett Community College directly. The consultant focused outreach efforts on Everett Community College because Edmonds Community College had already been in contact with Cedar Grove Composting.

2.2 Outreach

The consultant and SWD conducted an on-site visit and meeting with the Everett Community College facilities director. The director expressed interest in starting food waste collection but identified space constraints and lacked immediate support from the campus Faculty Sustainability Committee members, who have conflicting priorities. The consultant recommended various solutions, including offering to facilitate a process with the Sustainability Committee to determine overall goals and priorities for campus sustainability. The consultant attempted to follow-up with the facilities director, but received no response.

2.3. Outcomes

Communication was established with Everett Community College, but no concrete outcomes occurred during 2008. Follow up will continue in 2009.

3. Outreach to Large Businesses and Institutions

3.1. Recruitment

The consultant focused business recruitment on medium to large-sized businesses in sectors that have the potential to divert food waste and save money. The consultant had expected to work primarily with grocery stores, but discovered that all grocery stores in Snohomish County had either implemented or were in the process of implementing food scrap recycling. Consequently, the consultant identified alternate sectors with high potential (hotels, hospitals, institutions, and nursing/retirement homes), generated lists of businesses in each sector, and vetted the lists with Cedar Grove Composting and city recycling coordinators to ensure non-duplication of efforts. Following are the results of this process:

Grocery Stores: All grocery stores had either implemented food scrap recycling or were currently in process with Cedar Grove Composting. The consultant developed a list of grocery stores taken from a Snohomish County Health Department list of businesses permitted to handle food. When shared with the relevant people, the consultant learned that all grocery stores had either implemented food scrap recycling or were in dialog with Cedar Grove Composting to begin composting.

Hotels: Seven hotels with on-site food services were deemed to be suitable candidates, but all except one had already been contacted for organics diversion. This hotel, located in Stanwood, was outside of the current service operations of Cedar Grove Composting.

Hospitals: After the consultant identified hospitals as a possible source of food scraps, the city of Everett Recycling coordinator and SWD contacted Providence Medical Center in Everett

which began a pilot food scrap collection program. If the program is successful, Providence anticipates beginning food scrap collection at its other hospital in Everett. The city of Arlington Recycling coordinator and Cedar Grove Composting began discussion with Cascade Valley Hospital in Arlington to implement food scrap collection. Valley General Hospital in Monroe was identified as the remaining candidate.

Institutions: Snohomish County Corrections Department (“County Corrections”) was an outreach target. Producing approximately 3,700 meals each day, County Corrections had significant potential to reduce disposed waste through food scrap recycling.

Nursing/Retirement Homes: Larger nursing/retirement homes that feed 20-150 residents can be expected to produce significant quantities of organic waste through their kitchens. The consultant identified a list of 75 potential nursing/retirement homes in the Cedar Grove Composting service areas through four websites: www.retirementhomes.com, www.retirenet.com, www.carepathways.com, and <http://www.whca.org/> (Washington Health Care Association).

Based on the findings above, the consultant focused outreach on one hospital (Valley General Hospital), one institution (County Corrections), and nursing/retirement homes. A complete list of all targeted businesses and their results can be found in Appendix C.

3.2. Outreach

The consultant contacted 54 businesses to gauge their interest in participating in the food waste collection program. A total of thirteen nursing/retirement homes expressed an interest in starting food collection. The consultant conducted on-site meetings and walk-throughs with these businesses to determine their current waste set-up and capacity. The consultant estimated the potential tonnage diversion and cost savings using a recycling calculator and waste and organics information from each visited business. The consultant emailed the results to each business and followed up with phone calls to ascertain interest in participating in the program. These follow-up calls were supported by a postcard mailing and advertisement that appeared in the Everett Herald.

In addition, County Corrections and Valley General hospital were interested in programs. In the case of County Corrections, the consultant worked closely with the SWD. Potential cost savings were identified and a memorandum drafted that estimated potential cost savings for the program. Recommendations included phasing in the program at different locations within the facility and replacing individual plastic-packaged condiments with bulk condiments. The consultant coordinated with the SWD, Cedar Grove Composting, and County Corrections staff to conduct a training for kitchen staff. The consultant also drafted a press release to announce the implementation of the composting program at County Corrections. See Appendix C for a copy of the cost savings memorandum and press release.

Valley General Hospital was contacted by the SWD and a walk through conducted. The hospital is targeted for follow up in 2009.

Where possible, all businesses who were contacted by the consultant were classified as interested in implementing (“A”), not interested in implementing (“B”), or potentially interested in implementing

("C") after conversations on the phone or in-person. This classification can be found in Appendix C.

3.3. Outcomes

A total of 15 businesses and institutions expressed interest in the program. One institution implemented the program in 2008 (County Corrections), diverting 24.3 tons of material. Another business (Cascadian Place Retirement) wants to start implementation in 2009.

4. Outreach to Small Food Service Businesses

4.1. Recruitment

The consultant produced a target list of 650 food service businesses in the cities of Bothell, Lake Stevens, Mill Creek, Mountlake Terrace, Monroe, Mukilteo, Snohomish, and in the western half of unincorporated Snohomish County. The list was generated by the Snohomish Health District and based upon food establishments permitted in 2008. The list was refined and edited to categorize the businesses and better tailor outreach. It included the following categories: grocery, restaurant, tavern, caterer, bakery, deli in grocery, limited grocery, mini mart, retail meat & fish, mobile food vendor, food stand concession, etc.

The SWD and the consultant also created an introductory postcard, which was mailed to a broader group of 1,881 businesses throughout this target zone. The consultant and the SWD created a newspaper advertisement that ran for three weeks in The Everett Herald and community newspapers, trailing the mailed postcard by several weeks.

Tracking forms were used to document field visits. This and other information was used to record and track businesses visited, bins and bags distributed, compost programs started, level of interest in composting, and tonnage diverted by food waste composting.

4.2. Outreach

The consultant focused small business outreach on restaurants and food service businesses. Three hundred sixty-one (361) businesses received on-site assistance that promoted composting and recycling programs and that evaluated the potential cost savings by reducing their current volume of solid waste. All businesses visited were categorized according to their interest in and potential to start a food waste composting program. Of the 361 businesses visited, 30 started compost programs, 71 expressed interest in composting, 172 were categorized as "maybe interested," and 86 said they were not interested in composting their food waste.

Follow-up assistance was provided to 220 businesses, focusing on businesses previously visited and listed as "interested" or "maybe interested" in composting their food waste. A promotional flyer was developed and handed out to all businesses that received follow-up visits.

In addition, the SWD purchased 23-gallon Slim Jim™ containers and compostable bags to support food waste composting outreach efforts in Snohomish County as well as in the cities of Arlington, Edmonds, Everett, Marysville and Lynnwood. Three hundred fifty-three (353) Slim Jim™ containers and 317 boxes of bags were distributed to 77 businesses.

4.3. Outcomes

Thirty (30) businesses recruited by the consultant started composting programs in 2008, diverting nearly 1,279 tons of food waste from the landfill to the Cedar Grove Composting facility. Seventy-seven (77) businesses in Snohomish County received free Slim Jim™ containers and/or bags to support their new compost programs. (This included containers given to businesses recruited by city recycling coordinators.)

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned from 2008

The consultant, city recycling coordinators, and the SWD tried various outreach strategies in 2008 to determine what might work well and not so well. This section documents lessons learned from school and business outreach.

Lessons Learned from School Outreach

Supportive district and school staff members are key to the success of the program. Marysville Middle School's success is due to staff support on all levels, from the district, to the principal, to the kitchen staff, to the custodian. Outreach and assistance needs to be tailored to each school and district because each has unique waste and curriculum needs and goals. Additionally, staff is needed not only to educate students when starting a program, but also for constant monitoring during the first couple weeks of the program. Less monitoring is needed over time.

Food collection stations should be kept close to cafeteria tables. The farther students have to walk with their trays, the more likely they are to cause a mess.

Stacking trays significantly reduces waste. Stacking compostable trays reduces the number of compostable bags needed; stacking non-compostable trays will significantly reduce the volume (if not tonnage) of garbage.

Washington Association of Maintenance and Operations Managers (WAMOA) meetings are good places to highlight the program and recruit interested school districts. WAMOA meetings offer an opportunity to speak directly with district facilities and maintenance managers. This tactic appeared to work well in 2008.

Lessons Learned from Business Outreach

Cost savings must be significant. Many businesses did not see enough savings to justify participating in the program. Several businesses said they would need to see greater savings for them to take on a new program, retrain employees, and add another system to their business operation.

Alternatives to biodegradable bags should be presented. Several businesses reported difficulty with the compostable bags – they were tearing or ripping and did not hold as much weight as regular plastic bags. County Corrections discontinued their use because they found the bags to be too fragile. Instead, staff rinses out collection bins and tilt trucks regularly.

Providing bins and bags is important to the success of the program. All business owners were happy to receive the free bins and bags to help get their food compost programs running.

First month free programs are the most successful. Where the first month compost pick-up service was offered free of charge, it was a useful tool that increased participation. It seemed to encourage businesses to try the program without requiring a commitment or significant investment.

Language barriers created a perceived lack of interest. Few compost programs were started where language barriers existed between business owners or managers and outreach staff. It appeared to outreach staff that the majority of owners/managers with limited English did not care to participate in this program, even when it would have benefited their business. However, the multi-lingual composting instructions were very helpful to kitchen staff.

Employee education and participation is key. Few businesses cancelled service (only three out of 30). Reports from business owners who did quit stated that the reasons included difficulty getting their employees to understand, care and/or participate, and too great a distance between the kitchen and outdoor compost container. The compost trainings were valuable in successfully launching new compost programs, and it was helpful to have a Cedar Grove Composting trainer fluent in Spanish.

Businesses with property owners and management firms did not participate. Businesses located in strip malls did not participate in the food waste compost program. The reason for this was that it required approval from a property owner or management firm to change their garbage service. Tracking down property owners and managers so that programs could be presented to them proved to be difficult.

Visual materials and success stories encourage participation. Later in the program when materials containing pictures of businesses composting and participation lists could be handed out during business visits, momentum seemed to build. It was helpful for businesses within cities and throughout the county to see a list of businesses already participating. This appeared to further increase participation in the program.

Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of Overall Visits, Level of Interest by Geographic Area, Bins and Bags Distributed, and 2006-2008 Tonnage Changes.

Appendix B: Supporting Materials for School Outreach (Resource Guide for Educators)

Appendix C: Supporting Materials for Business Outreach

Appendix D: Photos from Business Outreach