

## WMM Study Group: Organics Management

Changing the way that organic waste (organics) is managed continues to be a focus of the waste industry in the United States. Organics is primarily yard and food waste, consisting of more than 20% of the total landfilled waste. Organics management is shifting away from landfilling and moving towards other methods such as large-scale composting, home composting and anaerobic digestion. In addition, educational efforts to reduce pre- and post-consumer food waste are resulting in less waste generation. Managing food residuals outside of landfills can also mean collaborating with partners to divert still-good food to local pantries and sending appropriate organics for use as livestock feed.

Twenty states, including Wisconsin have a complete ban on yard waste in landfills. Four states have bans or restrictions on food waste disposal in landfills. In 2014 Massachusetts implemented a landfill ban on business and institutional sources of food waste, where more than a ton of food waste is produced per week. The city of Seattle, Washington prohibits all residents and business from placing food waste and compostable paper in the waste stream. Vermont legislature passed a "universal recycling law" in 2012 which effectively bans food waste from disposal after 2020.

Managing organics outside of a landfill can have environmental benefits, however, the cost of providing organics collection and disposal is, at this time, typically more than landfilling. Responsible units of government, private waste management companies, regulatory agencies and waste industry trade associations are all working on improving the management of organic waste outside of landfills so that it can be more cost effective and implemented on a wider scale.

Wisconsin should be proactive in the management of organic waste. We have already been managing yard waste outside of the landfill. The next step is to reduce the amount of food waste being landfilled. Several Wisconsin communities have implemented pilot food waste collection programs. For instance, Brown County has a pilot program for those who wish to divert their source-separated organics from landfilling. Residents sign up for the program and transport their food waste to various drop off locations throughout the county. The city of Madison collects source-separated organics at the curb for a limited service area, but hopes to expand the service to over 2000 homes total in 2016. Both Brown County and Madison send their collected organics to anaerobic digesters.

Some compost facilities are accepting food waste on a pilot basis. In addition, the first dry fermentation anaerobic waste digester built in the United States is located at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. All of these actions are positive steps but we are a long way from having a comprehensive organics management policy and management program statewide.

The WMM Study Group should study, develop and recommend a course of action for managing organics and specifically food waste in Wisconsin. This would involve recommending potential operational practices, and regulatory and legislative actions that could be undertaken to enhance the management of organic waste in Wisconsin.