

Section 5 - 1: Implementing a Food Scrap Recycling Program



Why Recycle Food Scraps?

Montgomery County, Maryland has a goal to reduce waste and recycle 70 percent of all waste generated in the County by 2020, and businesses play an important role in meeting this goal. The approximately 35,000 businesses operating in Montgomery County produce over half of all solid waste generated in the County. Based on the most recent waste composition study completed by the County, food scraps account for nearly 25 percent of the non-residential or commercial waste stream. By implementing a food scrap recycling program, your business or organization will help encourage the development of commercial food scrap recycling and composting facilities in the region and support increased access to food scrap recycling opportunities.

Food scraps are recycled and processed into soil amendments and fertilizers. Food scraps can be placed in special containerized systems or in long piles called windrows. Over a period of time, microorganisms consume the organic matter and break down materials, resulting in compost. This material is high in nutrients, which are essential for the healthy growth of trees, plants, and flowers. Compost also reduces the need for commercial fertilizers. Adding compost to soil significantly improves drainage of the soil, which reduces runoff from rain and melting snow.

Recycling food scraps may be cost-effective for your business since recycling collection is typically less expensive than trash disposal. Your business is not creating more waste — you are just separating food scraps and other biodegradable items into different containers for recycling collection. In the end, you may be able to reduce the amount of trash disposed by your business or organization, which may save money!

Montgomery County SORRT Program

Setting up a food scrap recycling program at your business or organization takes some initial planning and coordinating. Here are some important steps to follow when establishing a food scrap recycling program:

1. Gain support from upper management.

To ensure the success of your food scrap recycling program, it is important to gain the support of top management from the start. Food scrap recycling programs can be set up cost-effectively in most organizations. Management will typically embrace these positive aspects of setting up a food scrap recycling program:

- Potential for reduced waste collection and disposal costs.
- Improved corporate image through recognition as a green company within your community.
- Increased employee pride in their workplace.
- Significant positive impact on recycling efforts of Montgomery County, while also preserving the environment.

2. Develop a Food Scrap Recycling Collection Plan for your business with the help of your Recycling Coordinator.

Any effective recycling program requires leadership. Since all businesses vary in layout, size, and types and quantities of waste generated, you should develop a plan in conjunction with your current recycling program that is unique to your business. Your recycling coordinator should be involved in this effort. If your business does not currently have a recycling coordinator, it is a good idea to designate an employee who can help plan your recycling efforts. Consider designating the office or facilities manager, or a particularly enthusiastic recycler at your company for this role.

Your Food Scrap Recycling Collection Plan should consider the following:

- Estimated amount of food scraps available for recycling at your organization.
- Protocols for the appropriate placement, maintenance, and cleanliness of the food scrap recycling containers.
- Strategy for ordering and re-ordering appropriate bins, containers, and supplies.
- Plan for transporting food scraps from interior food scrap recycling containers to centrally located collection containers, which are serviced by the food scrap

recycling collector/hauler contracted by your organization.

- Efforts to educate, train, and motivate employees and solicit their feedback and ideas.

3. Select a Food Scrap Recycling Collection/Hauling Service Provider.

It is important to select and contract with an experienced food scrap recycling collection service provider to transport your food scraps to a food scrap recycling processing facility. Working closely with your collector/hauler will allow you to develop the optimal food scrap recycling collection schedule and plan for your business. Be sure to consider the following factors:

- **Collection schedule:** This should maximize storage and collection of food scraps, while limiting the amount of time food remains on-site. Requesting collections after the majority of food preparation is completed and as late in the day as possible is most beneficial.
- **Allocated budget:** By maximizing the amount of materials recycled at your business or organization, you may actually reduce your solid waste disposal costs since recycling collection is typically less expensive than trash disposal.
- **Tracking and reporting:** It is important to track the amount of materials collected for recycling, including food scraps, as well as the amount of materials disposed as trash. This will help measure the success of your recycling efforts. In addition, this data is needed to complete the required Annual Business Recycling and Waste Reduction Report for Montgomery County. Documenting and obtaining this information can be coordinated with your food scrap recycling collector/hauler. You may also decide to purchase and use a floor scale to weigh the amount of food scraps collected for recycling.

4. Purchase supplies and implement the program.

You will need to purchase containers and supplies to properly separate food scraps designated for recycling from mixed paper and commingled materials collected for recycling, as well as from trash collected for disposal. Order different colored containers for recycling food scraps to make it easier for employees to participate. Food scrap recycling containers should be smaller in volume and size and have wheels

(or be set on dollies) due to the weight of food scraps. The size and number of containers will vary depending on the amount of food scraps your business generates. Also, coordinate with your food scrap recycling collector/hauler to determine what is acceptable for use as a biodegradable/compostable bag liner that can be purchased and used to facilitate food scrap recycling collection in your facility.



Once you purchase the necessary supplies and have contracted a food scrap recycling collector/hauler, it is important to consider the set-up and procedures for your food scrap recycling program.

- **Preparation:**

- ◆ Identify key locations in food preparation areas (i.e., cafeterias and kitchens) to place food scrap recycling containers.
- ◆ Identify suitable central locations for placing larger food scrap recycling containers to be emptied by your food scrap recycling collector/hauler.
- ◆ Purchase and use a floor scale to track the progress of your efforts by weighing the amount of food scraps your business collects for recycling. Use this data to complete your Annual Business Recycling and Waste Reduction Report.
- ◆ Promote the program, and be sure to report the results to your staff to keep them informed, enthusiastic, and involved in the process.
- ◆ Ask for feedback and ideas to make improvements as needed. Remember to train all new staff and provide refresher training sessions to staff on a regular basis.

- **Operation:**

- ◆ Use duct tape or another method to place a line on the outside of each food scrap recycling container to designate when the container is at 80 percent capacity. To avoid making your food scrap container extremely heavy, the bin should be emptied once this level is reached.
- ◆ Place a biodegradable/compostable bag liner in each food scrap recycling container to help maintain the cleanliness of the container. This makes it easier to transfer food scraps into the larger central food scrap recycling containers that will be serviced by your food scrap recycling collector/hauler. Verify compostable bag liners are accepted by your food scrap recycling collector/hauler before ordering these supplies.

- ◆ Place food scrap recycling containers at each designated location where food scraps are generated.
- ◆ Put acceptable types of food scraps generated during food preparation into the appropriate food scrap recycling containers.
- ◆ Once the container reaches 80 percent capacity, tie the compostable liner closed, wheel the bin to the collection area, and transfer the bag to the central collection container.
- ◆ Before transferring the bag, weigh and record the amount of food scraps collected for internal tracking purposes.
- ◆ Monitor the process to ensure staff compliance.
- ◆ Solicit ongoing employee feedback and make changes as needed.

5. Know what types of food scraps can be recycled.

Check with your food scrap recycling collector/hauler in advance to verify the list of items they will and will not accept for recycling, as this may vary by collector and processing facility.

Generally acceptable materials that can be placed in your food scrap recycling collection container include:



Meats, Fish, and Bones



Baked Goods



Fruits and Vegetables



Compostable or Biodegradable Items (Bags, Utensils, Takeout Containers, etc.)



Breads, Grains, and Pasta



Soiled Paper and Cardboard Products with Food



Dairy Products



Coffee Grounds and Tea Bags

The following items should **NOT** be placed in your food scrap recycling collection container:

- Polystyrene/Styrofoam®
- Ash
- Chemicals such as bleach, detergents, or degreasers
- Batteries
- Non-compostable serviceware
- Plastic wrap or non-compostable plastic bags

Reminder:

Mixed paper and cardboard should be placed in a separate mixed paper recycling container.

Aluminum cans and foil products, bi-metal (steel/tin) cans, glass bottles and jars, and plastic bottles, containers, trays, buckets, cups, and lids should be placed in a separate commingled materials recycling container.

6. Promote and sustain your program.

Maintaining a positive attitude towards recycling and keeping employee enthusiasm high is key to ensuring a successful program. Hold a kick-off event for your program to educate staff and encourage compliance. Distribute flyers and memos promoting the program to explain the benefits and importance of recycling food scraps. Take this opportunity to remind employees about your organization's overall recycling program and goals. The more information that is available, the more likely your staff will participate.

Reinforce positive behavior and report the results back to your staff to maintain their interest in the program. It is beneficial to:

- Report the amount of food scraps collected for recycling over time. Report your businesses' recycling rate to show employees how the program is working.
- Quantify the amount of food scraps collected for recycling in terms of solid waste disposal costs saved by the company.
- Remind employees about the types of food scraps that can be recycled. Remember to remind employees about all other types of items that can be recycled, including commingled materials and mixed paper.
- Reiterate positive effects of this program on the business, including improved corporate image through recognition as a green company within your community.
- Request employee feedback and solicit suggestions for program improvements.
- Congratulate your employees for their positive efforts.
- Consider providing rewards or incentives to encourage increased recycling.

Now that you are disposing of less waste as trash, renegotiate your waste disposal contract with your hauler/collector to save your business money. Check to see if your business can reduce the size of your trash container or the frequency of collections. However, remember that containers must be of sufficient size/capacity and collected frequently enough to prevent overflow between collections.

If you have any questions about recycling, or want to request additional educational materials to facilitate your food waste recycling program such as posters, brochures, and container labels, visit www.montgomerycountymd.gov/recycling or call the Montgomery County Division of Solid Waste Services **SORRT Program** (Smart Organizations Reduce and Recycle Tons) at **311** or **240-777-0311**.