



**2014-2015 Grand Jury Response Packet**

## Composting Organic Waste in Santa Cruz County

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors

## Findings

**Finding 1:** Compostable organic waste, which makes up approximately one third of municipal solid waste, must be diverted in order to extend the life of Santa Cruz County landfills and meet state mandates, specifically AB 1826.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

### Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

The organic waste stream in Santa Cruz County accounts for about 20-30 percent of the non-diverted waste that currently ends up in the landfill every year. Currently Santa Cruz County diverts approximately 37,394 tons of organic material from the waste stream annually. These materials are primarily yard waste, plant and other woody materials which are currently diverted and used to create a mix of mulches and other soil amendment products for use by the public.

At present the County of Santa Cruz also diverts approximately 775 tons of food waste annually, primarily from restaurant and grocery store producers. Due to this program and with the inclusion of a few more large-scale producers, the County will meet its phase one AB 1826 January 1, 2016 deadline.

In our efforts to get closer to our goal of zero waste, removing the remainder of the organic material from the current waste stream will be an important step.

**Finding 2:** Unless Santa Cruz County and the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola, Scotts Valley and Watsonville invest politically and financially in large-scale organics recycling systems, they will be out of compliance with AB 1826 by the year 2020 or sooner.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

### Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

Compliance with AB 1826 requires each jurisdiction to meet specific mandates for organics recycling for large scale producers of organic waste within phased in-time frames as follows: businesses who generate more than 8 cubic yards (cy) or more per week must source separate food scraps and yard trimmings and arrange for recycling services for that organic waste in a specified manner by April 1, 2016. By January 1, 2017, businesses generating 4 cy or more per week of organics are also subject to the diversion requirement. The bill also requires a business that generates 4 cy or more of commercial solid waste per week, on and after January 1, 2019, to arrange for organic waste recycling services and, if the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) makes a specified determination, would decrease that amount to 2 cubic yards, on or after January 1, 2020.

Each jurisdiction, on and after January 1, 2016, is required to implement an organics recycling program to divert organics from the businesses subject to this act, The law

does not require jurisdictions to develop large-scale organics recycling systems but rather to meet the needs of the producers who need organics recycling services. The size of any jurisdiction's facility will depend upon the size of the organics waste stream and the economics specific to managing that waste stream.

**Finding 3:** Santa Cruz County and the cities of Capitola, Scotts Valley, and Watsonville all passed resolutions in 2005 recommending a regional composting facility, but as of 2015, no facility has been constructed, nor is there a completed plan to do so.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

**Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):**

Long-range planning for a regional composting facility has been in discussion since 2007. Participants in this discussion have included all of the cities in Santa Cruz County, as well as the Monterey Regional Waste Management District. More recently Santa Cruz County and the cities of Scotts Valley, Capitola, Watsonville and Santa Cruz have engaged in cooperative conversations and planning for a regional organics facility through the Integrated Waste Management Task Force (IWMTF).

In concept, collaborative resource recovery programs that would be mutually beneficial and more cost effective than if each agency were to go it alone are extremely attractive. However, in recent years the IWMTF team has delved more deeply into the specifics of the organics waste stream for each jurisdiction, including the number of possible generators impacted by AB 1826, the potential tonnage of organic waste stream, waste stream and jurisdictional economics, land availability and permitting requirements. For some jurisdictions, participation in a regional facility may not make the most sense when the specific economic and waste stream factors are analyzed in-depth.

**Finding 4:** Rather than building a permanent local infrastructure for organics composting, Santa Cruz County and the city of Capitola opted to continue their commercial composting pilot programs by hauling food waste out of the county to the Monterey Bay Regional Waste Management District's composting facility, at considerable cost in time and fuel.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

**Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):**

The County of Santa Cruz instituted a pilot program in fiscal year 2004/05 for the collection of food scraps from a number of local commercial generators which was then composted within enclosed containers. This pilot program was an effort to 1) develop operational experience, including solutions to problems, on a small scale before expanding the program county-wide; 2) establish a core group of participating businesses that can assist with program outreach and serve as models for other food

waste generators; and 3) develop estimates of program costs that will assist in determining the rate structure for a future county-wide program. The pilot program, at its peak, was comprised of 75 participating businesses which turned approximately 125 tons per month of food scraps turned into valuable compost.

The pilot program was allowed to run until April 30, 2010. Projected site improvement costs necessary to meet State permitting requirements for a permanent facility were not feasible during the economic downturn and changing State laws made the composting technology in place for the pilot program problematic for a permanent facility. Rather than eliminate the program and return the diverted waste stream to the landfill, the County chose to continue diverting the food scraps through an agreement with the Monterey Regional Waste Management District, while continuing to work towards a permanent solution to the diversion of food scraps waste. This would insure that the core group of large food generators would continue best practices in organics diversion while new State laws and permitting procedures were developed.

**Finding 5:** Unless the Monterey Regional Waste Management District decides to expand its current organic composting facility, Santa Cruz County jurisdictions cannot rely on it as a long-term solution for their organic waste recycling needs.

**AGREE**  
 **PARTIALLY DISAGREE** - explain disputed portion below  
 **DISAGREE** - explain below

**Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):**

**Finding 7:** Rules about what can be put in the "green cart" are inconsistent and not well understood by the general public.

**AGREE**  
 **PARTIALLY DISAGREE** - explain disputed portion below  
 **DISAGREE** - explain below

**Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):**

The "green cart" is the collection container used only by residents in curbside collection of yardwaste materials. The rules for what can go in the green cart have been very consistent across the County and City jurisdictions for a number of years. Both the County and our franchise hauler, Greenwaste Recovery, send out regular reminders of what is accepted in each cart (see examples below).

[www.greenwaste.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/RecycleGuide\\_SantaCruzCounty\\_Residential\\_July2011.pdf](http://www.greenwaste.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/RecycleGuide_SantaCruzCounty_Residential_July2011.pdf)

[www.greenwaste.com/sites/default/files/2014\\_Spring\\_wasteline\\_SantaCruzCounty.pdf](http://www.greenwaste.com/sites/default/files/2014_Spring_wasteline_SantaCruzCounty.pdf)

It is important to note that the majority of organics material is produced by commercial organizations, such as grocery stores, restaurants and hospitals. AB 1826 is focused only on commercial customers and would not impact residential service or what gets put in the green cart. However, the County of Santa Cruz, in its efforts to move towards zero waste, is examining the potential for residential customers to also participate in greater organics waste diversion through curb-side servicing.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** In order to comply with AB 1826 mandates, the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and Watsonville should join with Santa Cruz County to form a regional agency to develop a large-scale organics recycling system located in Santa Cruz County.

**HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**

**HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE**

- indicate timeframe below

**REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

**WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** - explain below

### Response summary, timeframe or explanation:

While a regional agency might offer certain efficiencies and economies of scale for an organics recycling system, considerations such as land availability, environmental justice, permitting requirements, available organics processing technology and local economics will likely dictate the approach any jurisdiction will use to meet AB 1826 mandates.

A joint agency is one approach that might be taken, but there are others that could also be implemented. For example, the various agencies might develop a "Memorandum of Understanding," or MOU, laying out the basis for cooperation without developing an entirely new agency. Another approach might be to bring in a private compost operator and for each agency to sign a separate contract with that operator. Each agency will have to weigh a variety of factors in determining their approach to AB 1826 and each might decide to pursue independent solutions. Staff from the County and local cities along with expert consultants will continue to evaluate these issues and develop recommendations for how best to proceed within six months.



**Recommendation 2:** The current pilot program for composting food waste from restaurants and other large institutions in Capitola and Santa Cruz County should be expanded to serve other businesses in the AB 1826 first and second tiers throughout Santa Cruz County, including Scotts Valley and Watsonville, until a regional facility can be developed.

**HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**

**HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE** - indicate timeframe below

**REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

**WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** - explain below

**Response summary, timeframe or explanation:**

The County is in active conversation with our franchise hauler, Greenwaste Recovery and other local commercial waste haulers to develop plans and implement the expansion of the organics collection program mandated by AB 1826. We have identified potential participants, and are working to develop collection routes and new rates for this service in the unincorporated County. It is anticipated that an expanded program will be in place by early 2016 in time to meet the April 2016 deadline for the first phase of AB 1826 to begin. Santa Cruz County does not have any authority to expand the service area to jurisdictions outside of the unincorporated County.

In addition, organics recycling has been included in the current Request for Proposals for the new franchise hauler contract, which will begin in 2018.

**Recommendation 3:** After selection of a composting contractor and technology by the Local Task Force, Santa Cruz County and the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Watsonville should create a coordinated outreach program to inform businesses and the public about the benefits and requirements of the new organics recycling program.

**HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**

**HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE** - indicate timeframe below

**REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

**WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** - explain below

**Response summary, timeframe or explanation:**

The above recommendation assumes that composting will be the final technology selected for the diversion of organics materials from the waste stream. Other organics recycling methodologies exist and are still being considered by the Integrated Waste Management Task Force and the local jurisdictions.

In addition, the ongoing development of new state rules for composting operations, especially by the State Water Resources Control Board may delay or eliminate the use of composting as a feasible organics processing technology for many jurisdictions.

However, no matter what technology or method is ultimately decided upon for organics recycling, outreach and educational efforts will be extensive and an important component to the program's success.

**Recommendation 4:** Curbside “green carts” and bins should be clearly labeled to instruct residential and commercial customers specifying what materials are acceptable.

**HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**

**HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE** - indicate timeframe below

**REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

**WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** - explain below

**Response summary, timeframe or explanation:**

While existing residential green carts originally had labels indicating the material to be deposited, the labels may have disintegrated or may not account for all materials currently accepted in the green cart. With the beginning of the County’s new waste hauling franchise in 2018, all residential carts will be replaced and will include current, informative labels on acceptable materials.

Residents with curbside service can always access information on what should be placed in their specific carts (green/yardwaste, blue/recycling or grey/garbage) at: [www.greenwaste.com/santa-cruz-county/residential-services](http://www.greenwaste.com/santa-cruz-county/residential-services). Residents who self-haul and commercial customers can access recycling information for the unincorporated County at [www.santacruzcountyrecycles/index.html](http://www.santacruzcountyrecycles/index.html)