

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Larry's Markets Seattle, Washington

90% Recovery of Food and Floral Discards



Larry's Markets recovers approximately 870 tons of organics annually through its off-site composting and rendering programs. Stores also donate canned goods to local charities. The chain realizes a net savings of \$40-\$55 per ton of material recovered (about \$41,000 per year).

Program Description

In 1991, the head of the Environmental Affairs Program at this Seattle-based grocery chain performed an audit and found organics to be the largest part by volume of its waste stream. In order to reduce costs and expand its efforts towards total environmental responsibility, Larry's Markets began using energy-efficient lighting and heating and cooling systems, donating canned goods, and recycling materials including food and floral discards for composting.

As part of Larry's Markets' waste reduction efforts, a project team including management from all five stores worked to create a food recovery program that would fit into employee daily activities. Recycling, including composting, is now part of every employee's job description. In the produce department, staff put unsaleable produce and trimmings in unlined plastic tubs, which they wash periodically. The tubs sit on the bottom level of the cart staff use to stock produce. When tubs are full, staff put them on a central cart which holds eight tubs. They then bring full central carts outside and dump them into 1 1/2-cubic-yard

containers. These containers used to serve as garbage dumpsters; now stores keep their garbage in compactors until it is picked up, less than once a week. Previously, garbage had been picked up twice a week.

At the beginning, hauling compostables from stores was problematic. The hauling company experimented with various trucks and containers, but due to the weight of wet organics, trucks often reached their hauling weight limit before they had been to every store. This problem was solved by splitting the pick-up route between two trucks. In 1995, Larry's Markets contracted with two additional companies that haul organics and run **composting** sites. These companies pick up from stores near their sites. With three haulers picking up compostables, no hauler has a problem with weight limits. The discards are composted with yard trimmings, soil, and other organics to produce topsoil. Closing the loop, Larry's Markets uses the topsoil in its landscaping.

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Odors in the summer were a problem at first until the stores moved to more frequent pick-up of their compostables. Now, they are picked up two or three times a week from each store. Larry's Markets has had no vector problems.

The chain sends meat and fish bones, fat, and skin to a **rendering** facility. Staff in the meat and fish departments store trimmings in tubs in a 40°F cooler. Once a week Darling Delaware Company empties these tubs. Depending on the current market, Larry's Markets pays either nothing or 1¢/pound for this service.

Each store provides **donations** to a church or food bank that picks up non-perishables approximately once a week.

Costs/Benefits

Start-up costs were minimal. Two hundred dollars bought extra plastic tubs; stores use their existing dumpsters to collect compostable material.

Notwithstanding a 34% rise in disposal costs, in 1993, Larry's Markets avoided over \$20,000 in hauling and tipping fees, approximately 25% of its waste removal budget. In 1995, net savings through composting were approximately \$35,000.

Depending on the store and hauler, stores pay \$105-\$110 per ton in trash hauling and tipping fees, and \$55-\$65 per ton in food discard hauling and tipping fees, thus saving \$40-\$55 per ton composted.

Employees are proud of their accomplishments in helping the stores become environmentally and socially responsible. Customers are aware and appreciative of the efforts.

Tips for Replication

- Know the composition of your waste stream. This will help create the most effective diversion scheme for your business.
- Identify community resources. Larry's worked with the King County Solid Waste Division and with the Clean Washington Center, which provided help in assembling routes, contracting with its initial hauler, and negotiating with one yard trimmings composter to take food discards.
- Develop a good working relationship with government officials. The Washington State Department of Ecology helped with regulatory issues.
- Consider creative alternatives to meeting both your needs and the needs of the companies with which you work.
- Make a commitment to the environment.
- Build awareness of the program's value at all levels of the company.
- Be prepared to take at least six months to change worker habits and to effectively communicate the benefits of an organic discard recovery program. After the initial six months, continuing, though less intensive, training is needed to reinforce the message, and to teach company practice to new employees.

Program Summary, 1995

Sector	Supermarket
Retail Sales per year	\$100 million total, 5 stores
Start date	1991
Dedicated Employees*	0
Method	Off-site windrow composting; rendering; donations
Materials collected	Produce and floral trimmings and spoils, waxed cardboard; meat and fish discards; out-of-date canned goods
Part of comprehensive waste reduction program?	Yes
Total waste generated (TPY)	3,000 tons, 5 stores
Food, floral, waxed cardboard discards generated (TPY)	970 tons (estimated)
RESULTS:	
Food, floral, waxed cardboard discards recovered (TPY)	870 tons: 750 to compost; 120 to rendering (estimated)
Food, floral, waxed cardboard discards recovered (%)	90%
Total waste recovered	64%
COSTS:	
Average composting costs	\$55-65 per ton
Average avoided landfill hauling and tipping fees	\$105-\$110 per ton
Net savings	\$40-55 per ton

* A dedicated employee is one whose primary responsibility is working with the food discard program. TPY = tons per year