1 May 2017

2017 Organics Diversion Forecast & Opportunities

The production and use of compost is vital, and is at the nexus of existing state statutory goals: farm viability, water quality, stormwater management, climate change adaptation/resilience, and Universal Recycling. Organics recycling is a meaningful and achievable way to promote economic growth and deliver environmental benefits.

Organics is a growth sector creating livable wage jobs

Organics reclamation increases the number of livable-wage jobs. Vermont-based Grow Compost testified in the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee that their workforce “has grown from three employees in 2009 to 12 employees presently.” By the end of 2017, Black Dirt Farm will have gone from 2FTE in 2013 to 4+FTE. See BioCycle article for job creation trend data.

[Composting] “can reduce public and private sector solid waste management costs, creates jobs and businesses, and diversifies the economic base.” https://ilsr.org/initiatives/composting/

Long term, compost-based best management practices are more effective and less expensive:

• Increase soil organic matter to 4 – 8% provides storage for millions of gallons of stormwater upstream, at the property owner level, instead of treating it downstream
• Work at the watershed level to leverage local volunteerism
• Add a revegetation performance standard to the MRGP
• Control invasives: ban the use of hay bales for erosion and sediment control
• Train town road crews on the application of compost-based BMPS; create demonstration projects.

Failed Current BMPs

Severe erosion around culvert, no obvious amended soil, no vegetation established

Photo: Steve Wright

Multi-benefit roadside ditch BMP

Sheep in E. Randolph perform triple duty: manage invasive wild chervil, build soil health, maintain ditch

Photo: Jenn Colby
**Align actions with goals**

There are proven actions state government can take to advance Act 148’s Universal Recycling goals, and other statutory mandates.

- **Be a model**: ensure state buildings and facilities are source separating and recycling organics.
- **Create demonstration sites** for use of compost products on state-owned land.
- **Adopt a revegetation performance standard** for municipal roads & state highway construction projects (see example).
- **Create incentives** to increase water storage upstream, such as:
  - Aerate and amend lawns with compost
  - Modify Act 250 permitting and town building permits
  - Zero discharge requirements for new and existing development
  - Reduce flows vs. building larger wastewater treatment plants to handle anticipated increases in stormwater volume.

The CAV paper, *Soil Policy in Vermont, Drivers and Action: How Much is Enough*, includes dozens of actions for state agencies, municipalities and advocates to work with nature, and mimic natural system functions in the built environment. There is no shortage of opportunities to achieve multiple cost-effective benefits at the nexus of water quality, stormwater management, emissions reduction, carbon sequestration, community resilience, and farm viability.

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**Case Study: Texas Department of Transportation**

Over 30 years, TxDOT had tried five times — unsuccessfully — to establish vegetation on a steep, severely eroded overpass. There were 6-inch gullies running the entire length of the slope. In May 1999, partnering with the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission, they applied compost made from feedlot manure, cotton burrs and yard trimmings wood chips on the slopes at a depth of 3-inches, and filled the gullies with the compost. Grass seed was mixed in with the compost prior to application.

By mid-June, thick grass was growing on soil that has been barren since the highway was constructed over 30 years before.

*Compost was the only treatment that provided a successful growing media.*

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"Improving soil health is the single most impactful thing we can do to reduce stormwater runoff and improve overall ecosystem health at all scales."

*VT ANR*