



Did you know that each year a typical household throws away an estimated 474 pounds of food waste? In Ohio, that's enough food scraps to pile on a football field as high as the Sears Tower (more than 1,450 feet)! Food scraps generated by all households in the United States could be piled on a football field more than five miles (26,400 feet) high!

Up to 90 percent of waste thrown out by businesses like supermarkets and restaurants is food scraps. In fact, food scraps are the third largest segment of the waste stream with nearly 26 million tons generated each year. Unfortunately, it is also the least recovered.

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*Food scraps are the third largest segment of the waste stream, behind paper and yard waste. Yet less than three percent is recovered.*

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The top two portions of the U.S. waste stream (paper and yard waste) have been successfully diverted from landfills through recycling and composting efforts, with recovery rates of 50 percent and 62 percent, respectively. Paling in comparison, the food scraps recovery rate is less than three percent.

Ohio EPA encourages communities and businesses to divert food scraps from landfills by composting. Not only does the environment benefit from keeping food scraps out of landfills, but communities and businesses can save money by reducing their disposal costs. Through the composting process, food scraps are transformed into a compost product that can be used in gardens and landscapes to provide many benefits to the soil. As a result, a material that may have been taken to the landfill will instead add value to the land.

This brochure will give you the basic information you need to decide if food scrap composting is a good alternative for your community or business.

## What are food scraps?

Households and businesses such as supermarkets, restaurants and cafeterias all produce food scraps. Food scraps include leftover portions of meals (post-consumer food scraps) and trimmings from food preparation activities (pre-consumer food scraps). Instead of sending this organic material to a landfill, many schools, businesses and communities throughout the country have begun composting it.

In addition to the environmental benefits of composting, which include diverting waste from landfills and producing a nutrient-rich soil amendment, disposing of food scraps through composting can significantly decrease disposal costs and serve as an opportunity for educational outreach. Large-scale projects in San Francisco, Seattle and Minneapolis and several smaller projects in Ohio are proving that food scraps composting is a viable alternative to disposal.

## How can I eliminate food scraps?

The best way to eliminate food scraps is not to create it in the first place. When doing your grocery shopping or stocking your business' kitchen, buy only the produce you can use before it spoils and resist the temptation to buy in bulk just to save money. At restaurants, ask about portion sizes and consider side dishes included with entrees. At buffets, take only what you can eat.

## Is onsite composting right for me?

Before starting an onsite composting project, call your local waste hauler and/or recycling coordinator to determine if there is an existing or planned food collection program in your area. Ask your waste hauler if they offer a discount for separated organic materials. A list of composting facilities is available on Ohio EPA's Web site at [www.epa.state.oh.us/dsiwm/pages/comp\\_docs.html](http://www.epa.state.oh.us/dsiwm/pages/comp_docs.html).

If your community or business has the resources and equipment available, establishment of an onsite food scraps composting facility may be a good choice. Establishing your own facility may offer advantages that are not enjoyed by partnering with a commercial composting facility, such as low transportation costs and use or sale of compost product.

If there are no existing programs available, you should consider the following questions before proceeding with a large-scale, onsite food composting program. Do you...

- have enough space?
- have staff resources to separate food from trash and/or to operate equipment?
- have the appropriate infrastructure (electrical, sewer backup) for the type of technology you want to use?
- have an end use for the finished compost?
- have the support and cooperation of nearby businesses or residential neighbors?

Before you decide to establish an onsite composting facility, be sure you are aware of applicable regulations. Composting facilities that accept food scraps are classified by Ohio EPA as Class II composting facilities. More information about the applicable rules and regulations can be found online at [www.epa.state.oh.us/dsiwm/document/guidance/gd\\_667.pdf](http://www.epa.state.oh.us/dsiwm/document/guidance/gd_667.pdf).

## What types of food scraps should I compost?

If you choose to develop an onsite composting facility, the next step is to decide if you will manage post-consumer food scraps, pre-consumer food scraps or both.

It is often best to focus first on pre-consumer food scraps. This portion of the waste stream consists mostly of unprocessed

fruits, vegetables and grains discarded during food preparation. These materials are more readily composted and can be easily separated and collected in designated containers by kitchen staff. With this process, you are more likely to ensure an uncontaminated waste stream and can better gauge whether the program will be successful if expanded to include post-consumer food scraps.

For those involved in the collection and composting of both pre- and post-consumer food scraps, proper training and education is vital. Accidentally including items such as plastic utensils and bottles with the food scraps may result in the contamination of the collected compost material.

## What are some of the benefits of onsite composting?

Not only does the environment benefit from keeping food scraps out of landfills, but communities and businesses can save money by reducing their collection and disposal costs. By separating food waste, businesses can inventory the excess food they are creating and then implement source reduction practices to save money. Composted materials may be used in landscaping or sold for a profit.

## What else do I need to know?

To reduce or eliminate contamination of collected food scraps, you must be prepared to educate all participants or employees who may handle the waste. One way to avoid contamination is to use compostable utensils and dishes instead of traditional plastic disposables.



## What about odors and pests?

Separating food waste from the rest of your garbage should actually help reduce problems with odor and pests. The compost process produces little odor as long as the system is properly aerated and materials are properly mixed. It should be noted that home composters should avoid collecting meats and high-fat products, since backyard composting equipment may not aerate and mix as efficiently as commercial equipment.

## What are some of the alternatives to onsite composting?

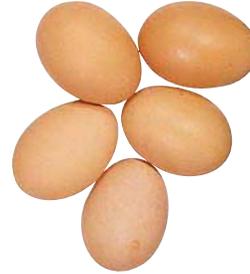
If you are unable to participate in a food scraps composting project at this time, there are many alternatives for handling your food scraps.

Communities or businesses may choose to partner with an existing food scraps composting facility. This option may be ideal for settings where suitable land or resources to

manage a composting facility is unavailable. A list of food scraps composting facilities is available on Ohio EPA's Web site at [www.epa.state.oh.us/ocapp/food\\_scrap/](http://www.epa.state.oh.us/ocapp/food_scrap/).

While partnering with an existing composting facility offers advantages over establishing your own facility, there are items that need to be addressed. The identified composting facility may offer to transport the food scraps from the business but if not, it will be necessary to contact a hauling company. You should also be sure to ask if there are certain food scraps or compostable materials that the composting facility does not accept.

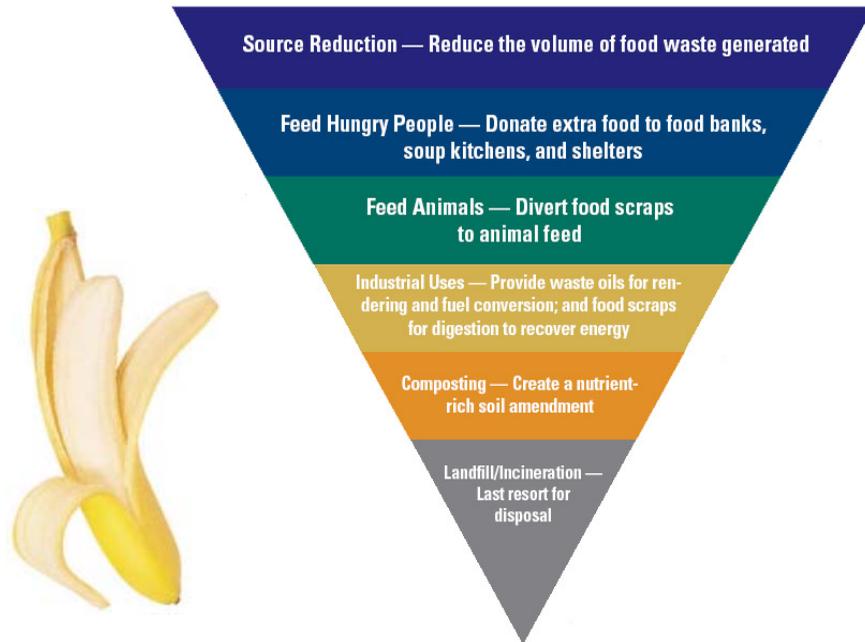
U.S. EPA developed the food waste recovery hierarchy shown below to emphasize how excess food can be put to productive use.



## Where can I get more help?

Visit Ohio EPA's Web page on food waste at [www.epa.state.oh.us/ocapp/food\\_scrap/](http://www.epa.state.oh.us/ocapp/food_scrap/) to find out more about food scraps composting. You can find success stories from Ohio and other parts of the country, information on existing composting facilities, and other information to help you begin diverting food waste from Ohio's landfills.

For more information, contact the Composting Unit in Ohio EPA's Division of Solid and Infectious Waste Management at (614) 644-2621.



Ted Strickland, Governor  
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## Managing Food Scraps to Protect the Environment



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