

Grocery Store Surplus Food Management FAQs & Strategies: Food Scrap Composting

The **Illinois Grocery Store Surplus Food Management Project** is designed to support grocery stores to better manage surplus food through food waste prevention, surplus food donation and food scrap composting. Bright Beat and Seven Generations Ahead provided professional support to a local grocery store/chain by analyzing current food waste generation and recommending best practices to reduce waste, implement donation, increase diversion and gain recognition.

- 1. WHY: Why should we manage surplus food by food scrap composting instead of sending it to the landfill?**
 - **It's good for the environment.** The use of recycled food waste as compost improves soil health and structure; increases drought resistance; and reduces the need for supplemental water, fertilizers, and pesticides.
 - **It's good for our health.** Food grown in compost not only tastes better, it is more nutritious than food grown with synthetic fertilizers. Plus, farmers yield more food when it is grown in compost rich soil.
 - **It's good for the air.** When food is landfilled, it decomposes without air, which creates methane, a greenhouse gas that is more than 20x times stronger than carbon dioxide...not good for our atmosphere.
 - **It's good for business.** Implementing commercial food scrap composting can earn your business recognition from the Illinois Food Scrap Coalition's "We Compost" program, <http://illinoiscomposts.org/we-compost>.
- 2. WHAT: What surplus food can and cannot be composted? In general...**
 - **Acceptable food items:** Meat, bones, cheese, whole fruits and vegetables and peels, cores & scraps
 - **Acceptable non-food items:** Flowers, napkins, paper towels, corks, wood chopsticks and toothpicks
 - **Not acceptable items:** Plastic gloves, shrink wrap, Styrofoam, recyclables, large amounts of cooking oil



Confirm what is accepted by your compost hauler as these are subject to change and compost method.

- 3. HOW: How must we change operations to better manage surplus food through food scrap composting?**

Conduct a waste assessment to identify where you can make the most impact. 75% of an average supermarket's waste stream is compostable material. The produce department in a typical supermarket will generate 50% of the store's waste. Make composting easy and accessible for the produce department. Priority departments include:

 - Produce
 - Floral
 - Bakery
 - Deli
 - Seafood and Meat
 - Cheese and dairy
 - Grocery and frozen foods
 - Prepared foods

Be sure to demonstrate and prioritize proper sorting, place bins strategically to maximize collection, and display signs in multiple languages (if needed). Employee education is also vital to a successful food scrap program, including the reasons "why" from above.



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4. **WHERE: Where are we expected to house and/or fit compost bins in limited space?**

Use small buckets, bin caddies or tall bins with smaller footprints. Hold food scraps in cold storage, and reduce trash bin quantity/size to accommodate space for food scraps in compost containers instead. For more tips visit illinoiscomposts.org.

5. **WHO: Who will pick up and/or haul and process the foods and food scraps?**

Your existing recycling and trash hauler may also haul food scraps. If not, the growing list of organics haulers includes: Collective Resource, Healthy Soil Compost, Independent Recycling Services, Lakeshore Recycling, Organix Recycling, Republic Services, Resource Center, Roy Strom, Urban Canopy, Waste Management and WasteNot Compost. FindAComposter.com lists local composting operations. **Alternatively, a reverse logistics approach such as sending surplus food for donation and/or composting back to the distribution center for centralized pick-up, reduces individual store pick-ups and works well for some chains.**

6. **COST: How much will it cost to participate in a commercial compost program?**

Separating food from your recyclable and trash/landfill waste streams can reduce the weight and frequency of trash services. The cost depends on a number of factors such as size and quantity of collection bin(s), volume, frequency of pick up, and your compost hauler. Estimating costs is much easier upon completion of a self-assessment.

7. **ISSUES: How do we prevent bad smells and vectors from food scraps?**

Food waste dumped in standard trash cans and dumpsters can attract rodents and insects, as well as generate bad odors. We recommend placing food scraps and organic waste in closed, leak proof, durable, and reusable containers. Also, holding food scraps in cold storage or simply scheduling timely pick-ups for composting can reduce and even eliminate these problems.

For more how-to tips and case studies, visit illinoiscomposts.org -> We Compost -> Grocery Toolkit

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