

VOTE TO BUILD A STRONGER COMPOSTING ECONOMY AND FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE IN COLORADO



Support Senator Lisa Cutter's bill to build healthy soil through compost, reduce methane gas, and extend the life of existing landfills

THE PROBLEM: COLORADO COMPOSTS ONLY 6% OF ITS DISCARDED ORGANIC MATERIALS

Colorado landfills over 2 million tons of food scraps and yard trimmings each year, making up more than a third of all materials going to the landfill.^{1,2} There is a better use for these valuable resources than burying them in the ground, where they fill up our limited landfill space and produce methane, a powerful greenhouse gas! Instead, edible foods should first be donated to food banks, and inedible organics made into compost or mulch. These more productive uses would feed hungry Coloradans, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support resilient local economies, create green jobs, and build healthy soils and more productive agricultural lands.

We are missing a big opportunity to fight climate change and increase resiliency in our state. Landfills are the third-largest source of human-related methane emissions in the US. When food and yard waste is composted and applied to soils instead, these discards transform from being a major source of greenhouse gasses to being a powerful climate solution that builds healthy soils and plants that can draw down excess CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it long-term underground. Soils can store three times more carbon than plants.³ Additionally, compost can dramatically increase soil's water-holding capacity, helping make our state more resilient to drought and flooding.⁴

Colorado is missing out on green jobs and economic benefits. Producing and using compost sustains 5 times more jobs than landfilling yard debris and food waste.⁵ In fact, nationwide, for every 1 million tons of food scraps and yard trimmings converted into compost and used locally, composting can create 1,400 new jobs.⁶ Rural communities in Colorado struggle to increase their waste diversion rates because they are so far away from processing facilities and markets. Compost is something that can be produced locally in rural communities and therefore not only provide local economic, environmental, and agricultural benefits, but also increase waste diversion.

Colorado lacks important infrastructure, markets and incentives to promote the use of compost. Only 13 counties have commercial composting facilities with permits to accept food scraps and yard debris for composting.⁷ While landscaping markets for compost exist in urban centers, farmers need more access to affordable compost in order to put it to work building soil and growing more nutritious food. The potential demand for finished compost is 5 times greater than the amount of compost currently being generated today in Colorado.⁸

1 Eco-Cycle. "The State of Recycling and Composting in Colorado." (2022) [Report: The State of Recycling and Composting in Colorado 2022 - Eco-Cycle. https://ecocycle.org/resources/report-the-state-of-recycling-and-composting-in-colorado-2022](https://ecocycle.org/resources/report-the-state-of-recycling-and-composting-in-colorado-2022)

2 CDPHE. "Waste Composition of Municipal Solid Waste Disposal." (2018) <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/swreports>. Accessed 10/12/22.

3 Ontl, T. A. & Schulte, L. A. "Soil Carbon Storage." (2012) Nature Education Knowledge 3(10):35. <https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/soil-carbon-storage-84223790/>.

4 Goud, M.C. Michigan State University Extension. "Compost increases the water holding capacity of droughty soils." (2015). https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/compost_increases_the_water_holding_capacity_of_droughty_soils

5 Platt, B. "Composting makes \$en\$e: Jobs through Composting and Compost Use." (2013). <https://ilsr.org/composting-sense-tables>

6 Platt, B. "State of Composting in the U.S.: What, Why, Where & How." (2014) <https://ilsr.org/state-of-composting/>

7 Colorado Hazardous Materials and Waste Management Division. Commercial Composting Facilities List (2023). <https://oitco.hylandcloud.com/CDPHERMPop/docpop/docpop.aspx?clienttype=html&docid=3127143>

8 CDPHE. "Statewide Organics Management Plan." (2022) <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/hm/statewide-organics-mgmt-plan>

THE SOLUTION

1 Develop policies to divert organic materials away from landfills and into beneficial uses from highest preference to lowest including:

- Feeding hungry people
- Feeding animals
- Producing compost, mulch and biochar or diverting to anaerobic digestion

These policies could include requiring diversion of these organic discards from landfills, or other food recycling requirements.

2 Invest in organic materials diversion and composting infrastructure, create a stronger demand for finished compost and mulch, and support the growing number of Colorado organics composting businesses around the state.

- Colorado needs more compost infrastructure throughout the state to turn organic discards into nutrient-rich soil amendments that allow soil to absorb and hold more water, helping to prevent flooding, erosion, and water loss due to runoff.
- Stronger demand for finished compost will help compost manufacturers around the state invest in new equipment and facilities to increase the recovery of organic waste throughout Colorado.
- Incentives will encourage the use of compost on Colorado farms, ranches, and other rural and urban landscapes to sequester and store more carbon in our soils, thereby reducing carbon in the atmosphere.

PLEASE SUPPORT Senator Cutter's bill to evaluate how to move Colorado forward in diverting food and yard debris from Colorado landfills.

This bill would direct the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to:

1. **Conduct a study** of what Colorado communities and other states are doing regarding organic waste diversion policies, create policy recommendations for increasing diversion of valuable organic materials from landfills, and develop strategies for assisting Colorado businesses and jurisdictions to build out necessary composting infrastructure and grow local compost markets.
2. **Convene stakeholders** to inform the Department regarding organic materials to target, ways to phase in policies to best divert materials while supporting development of needed infrastructure, best methods of monitoring and enforcement, and current barriers to diversion from landfills.
3. **Assess the economic and environmental benefits**, as well as how to mitigate negative or unintended impacts, of policies to divert organic waste from the landfill across the state.

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