

Food Waste Composting Program Case Study



Profile Summary

The Gardner Ale House is a family style brew pub and restaurant located at 74 Parker Street in downtown Gardner. It has been in business since 2006 and is renowned for its house-brewed beers. The restaurant, which serves an average of 1,700 meals per week, has been making continuous progress on its journey toward more sustainable operations. The facility has LED lighting, uses biodegradable take-away containers and diverts 72% of its waste to be recycled or used as animal feed.

Diversion Programs

The Gardner Ale House diverts more than 20 tons of spent barley malt annually from the brewery operation to a local pig farmer who uses it for feed. Nearly 13 tons of cooking oil is donated annually to a local neighborhood group engaged in sustainable projects such as energy conservation and agricultural self-sufficiency. Early recycling activities focused on capturing glass from the bar area and disposing of corrugated cardboard in a town-sponsored collection container.

In August, 2012, the restaurant implemented a compost program to divert food scraps from its trash. Spearheaded by owner Rick Walton's belief that composting in a restaurant "just makes sense" and that capturing this reusable material is the more "appropriate" way to operate the business, the Ale House now diverts more than 50 tons of organics from the kitchen annually. The management team took advantage of the related trainings to also engage staff in improved recycle separation in order to maximize its waste reduction goal.

Employee Training

The new diversion programs were embraced by employees who viewed the separation activities as a way they could make a difference in their job. At first the staff was challenged by "what goes where" questions, but the separating soon became habit. Walton explains that "they now don't know how to do it any differently and would not be happy if the program stopped!"



Several training sessions were held to provide the Gardner Ale House's 68 employees with the opportunity to learn about the new food and recycle diversion programs, confirm the classification of various waste streams, and offer suggestions for how to streamline separation activities. Signs that list and depict "Compost," "Recycle" and "Trash" materials help to clarify the proper disposal route. The signs are maintained to capture all waste streams, which eases the training for new hires.



Compost Logistics

Program champions like Walton, employee education and convenient logistics were instrumental to the compost program's success. Flat hotel pans and plastic pails capture food scraps at each prepping, cooking and scraping station. The organics are taken out in five-gallon plastic pails and consolidated in two 64-gallon totes, which the hauler prefers to collect three times per week. Frequent emptying of the totes minimizes the need for any additional housekeeping activities.

Implementation Challenges

At first staff was unsure how to best handle ramekins with left-over sauce or dressing. To support the goal to divert as much material as possible from the trash, they empty the contents into the compost pail and combine the containers in a pail of water to rinse before recycling.

The restaurant had been using compostable kiddie cups for a more eco-friendly disposable. However, these cups could not be treated as compost because the material was being used for animal feed and not being converted to landscape material.

Program Evaluation

The Gardner Ale House now diverts approximately 15% of its waste for animal feed and 57% for recycling; only 28% of the waste is treated as trash. Because several waste management logistics were changed at the same time, it is difficult to quantify how the separate hauling of the organics impacted total disposal costs. Walton does not believe that price savings were achieved. However, he notes that overall waste management conditions have improved with the implementation of the compost program because the solid waste container is less full and the presence of odors and flies is significantly reduced by keeping the food waste more contained and taking it off site more frequently.

Walton encourages other restaurants to divert their organic material, stating that establishing a compost program is "too easy not to do and it makes such a difference in the amount of trash we send to the landfill." He is proud of the example the Gardner Ale House is setting for others and the difference that his team is making. He also hopes that the restaurant's focus on reducing waste influences the employees' actions at home.



The Devens Eco-Efficiency Center guided the implementation of the compost program, with assistance from the Center for EcoTechnology and grant funding from the Mass. Department of Environmental Protection.

