

**Waste Not, Want Not**  
**Food Scrap Management Important for Environment**  
**June 2007**

While recycling efforts for paper and yard waste have grown exponentially in the last thirty years -- it's now up to 50 percent for paper and 62 percent for yard waste -- the recovery rate for food scraps hovers at less than three percent.

To put that in perspective, if a year's worth of Ohio's discarded food scraps were dumped on a football field, the pile would be as high as the Sears Tower.

Ohio EPA's Office of Compliance Assistance and Pollution Prevention (OCAPP) and Division of Solid and Infectious Waste Management (DSIWM), have teamed up to create a [brochure](#), [fact sheet](#) and [Web site](#) to get the word out about the benefits of community and business food scrap composting and management options.



### **What Are Food Scraps?**

Truth be told, most of us probably don't give much thought to what we do with our food scraps, and for that matter, don't know what qualifies as food scraps and what doesn't. Food scraps are categorized as pre-consumer (trimmings from food preparation) and post-consumer (leftover portions from meals). Fruits, vegetables, grains and meat are excellent composting materials.

Some potential composters may worry about odors and pests, but in reality, the composting process produces little odor as long as the system is properly aerated and materials correctly mixed. (As a general rule, animal or high-fat products should not be included in backyard composting because home equipment does not aerate and mix as efficiently as commercial equipment, and odors may result.)

Composting isn't quite as simple as tossing table scraps onto a pile, though. Proper composting requires that all participants be trained to understand how to separate materials to prevent contamination. For example, dumping plastic utensils in with the organic material will contaminate the whole batch. Fortunately, biodegradable utensils and dinnerware have been developed in recent years that eliminate the contamination problem.



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### **The Tangible Benefits of Composting**

Besides keeping food scraps out of landfills, there are other tangible benefits to community and business composting. Waste collection and disposal costs may decrease. By separating food waste, businesses can inventory the excess food they are creating and adjust purchasing accordingly. And composted material may be used in landscaping or even sold for profit.

A waste audit conducted by [Youngstown State University](#) in the spring of 2005 revealed that 35 percent of YSU's waste consisted of food scraps, with 300 pounds a day coming from the main dining hall alone. With support from the Mahoning County Solid Waste District, the university invested in an in-vessel composting system to handle kitchen scraps (pre-consumer) and plate-scrappings (post-consumer). After an initial semester of collecting only dinner waste proved successful, YSU's recycling program plans to expand the project next fall to include all meals served in the dining hall. This expansion will divert more than 20 tons of food waste from local landfills each year, and the resulting composted material is used by the grounds department for campus landscaping.

Private industry can also reap economic benefits from composting. [Paygro](#) is a major supplier of horticultural, lawn and garden products based in South Charleston, Ohio (Clark County). In May 2006, the company received a grant from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to purchase and install a food waste grinding system to improve its composting facility. The grinder speeded up the composting process, and also made acceptance of waste mixed with biodegradable packaging more practical. As a result, Paygro has new food waste streams from ConAgra and North American Nutrition, and has pilot projects in the works with The Ohio State University and Honda of America.

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## Food Scrap Composting Alternatives

As beneficial as food scrap composting is, sometimes it's just not a practical solution due to space or financial considerations.

As shown here in U.S. EPA's food waste recovery hierarchy, the best solution is not to create food waste to begin with. When grocery shopping, buy only what you will use before it spoils. At restaurants, consider portion sizes before ordering additional side dishes, and take only what you will eat at buffets.

Other alternatives include donating extra food to food banks, diverting scraps to animal feed and others as outlined in the pyramid.

But if you as an individual, community or business can compost, do it. As the folks at Cornell University's Waste Management Lab say, "Compost ... because a rind is a terrible thing to waste!"

