



Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority

---

# Agenda Report

---

**TO:** CCCSWA BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
**FROM:** ASHLEY LOUISIANA, PROGRAM MANAGER  
**DATE:** OCTOBER 24, 2019  
**SUBJECT:** 2018 HOME COMPOSTING PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT

## SUMMARY

The *Home Composting for Busy People!* Program has served RecycleSmart communities with backyard composting instruction and assistance since 1995 (20-year program anniversary in 2015). The program promotes small-scale home composting and other yard and food waste reduction and reuse practices. Additionally, the program helps our member agencies meet State-mandated AB 939, and new SB 1383 organic waste reduction and greenhouse gas emission reduction goals.

The program was awarded with the “Composting Program of the Year” award in 2016 by the US Composting Council (USCC). The USCC is a nation-wide organization, and one of the largest organizations promoting the recycling of organics through composting. The award recognizes over 20-years of outreach and education.

The program serves an additional important function; it is a true source-reduction program (activities designed to reduce the volume of waste generated or the reuse of resources). The organic material stays at the source, not having to be collected, transported nor processed. Source reduction is considered the highest tier in the waste reduction hierarchy, and most preferable approach. For this reason, the program is critical during annual reporting to CalRecycle.

This report describes how the *Home Composting for Busy People!* Program performed in 2018 to expand organics recycling in the RecycleSmart service area.

### **Program Participation in 2018:**

- 1,207 compost bins were purchased
- 1,977 residents are certified as a home composter
- 253 residents participated in home composting workshops
- 1,542 tons of organic material diverted from landfilling

## RECOMMENDED ACTION

1. This report is provided for information only. No Board action is required.

## **DISCUSSION**

The *Home Composting for Busy People!* Program consists of five components:

1. Workshop Participation
2. CompostSMART Advanced Training and Volunteer Outreach
3. Reduced Cost Compost Bins
4. Home Composting Certification (bill reduction)
5. Outreach and Assistance

The program operates so that all components work together to provide a balanced menu of instruction, support services and incentives for residents to expand the practice of home composting and increase diversion of organics.

### **Workshop Participation**

In 2018, **253** residents attended **9** home composting workshops. RecycleSmart contracts with three individuals for workshop instruction; Billi Haug, Lorraine Frey and Marian Woodard. All instructors are Contra Costa County Certified Master Gardeners, have completed advanced composting training and have decades of experience in several public speaking, composting, gardening and sustainable living practices.

RecycleSmart continues to partner with local community gardens including the Contra Costa Master Gardeners demo garden in Walnut Creek (“Our Garden”), the Lafayette Community Garden, Moraga Gardens Farm and the Bounty Garden in Danville.

Vermicomposting (worms) workshops provide a small-scale composting option for multi-family residents with smaller spaces.

RecycleSmart continues to contract with The Gardens at Heather Farm for Compost in the Classroom instruction. All twenty classes were filled in 2018.

### **CompostSMART Advanced Training and Volunteer Outreach**

CompostSMART is now in the third year of providing advanced composting training and volunteer outreach opportunities in our communities. Participating volunteers have completed over **150 hours** of organics related outreach and projects since the first pilot program in 2016.

There have been three high level projects through 2018-2019:

1. Residential organics cart audits
2. Composting demonstration site at The Gardens at Heather Farm
3. Farmers Markets

***Residential organics cart audits.*** Volunteers planned the first walking residential organics cart audit in October 2018, and will be performing a second audit in November 2019. Over 1,000 green carts

throughout the RecycleSmart service area were visually checked, and left with an informational “You’re Composting Smart!” tag, or an “Oops” tag. The tags are meant to provide positive reinforcement, reduce contamination in the green cart, and remind residents to compost food and food-soiled paper. There are no contamination fees associated with these audits. All member agencies, including police, were made aware of the audits, and many residents had the opportunity to discuss questions and concerns with the volunteers and staff while performing the audits at the curb.

The audit produced a 46% participation rate, and 19% contamination, with the main contaminants being plastic, pet waste and other general trash items. After the audit, staff used the information to post a trivia “poll” on Nextdoor, asking residents which item is a contaminant in organics (pet waste being the answer) and over 1,000 residents responded.

The face-to-face interaction, along with the informational cart tags, is the most responsive form of community-based outreach to encourage behavior change, and the audits will assist with upcoming SB 1383 organics requirements.

***Composting demonstration site.*** RecycleSmart has partnered with The Gardens at Heather Farm in Walnut Creek to construct a composting demonstration site within the new community garden. The site is open to the public during normal business hours, and sits directly on the Heather Farm Park walking trail, where hundreds of residents have exposure each day. Large banners and signs visually outline the benefits of composting organics. CompostSMART volunteers planned the entire demonstration site, built the site, and maintain the compost bins on a weekly schedule. CompostSMART volunteers are also training the community garden members to eventually maintain the majority of the site, and incorporate composting and organics recycling into their everyday gardening routine. All of the green waste within the community garden will be composted on site, rather than being hauled to the Walnut Creek corporation yard to be serviced by Republic Services. The new site will also be one of the permanent training locations for the CompostSMART program, and can provide public workshops in the future.

***Farmers Markets.*** CompostSMART now has a monthly information booth at the Shadelands Walnut Creek Farmers Market, and plans to expand into Orinda, Moraga and Danville. Volunteers are planning and designing all of the visuals and information at the booth, with a focus on organics recycling and composting at home. Volunteers also work the RecycleSmart/Republic Services booth at community events, and are gaining a wider knowledge of the industry as a whole, including blue cart recycling and other waste diversion activities.

### **Reduced Cost Compost Bin Sales**

To encourage residents to compost, RecycleSmart sells the Soilsaver compost bin at a reduced price. Over the past two years, Staff has adjusted pricing of the bin to find the right price point. RecycleSmart adjusted the cost to \$20.00 for a Soilsaver in early 2018 as a promotion in the winter RecycleSmart newsletter. During the newsletter promotion (about three months) over **1,200** Soilsaver compost bins were purchased (more sales than several years combined in the past). As of April 1, 2018, Staff increased the price of the bin to \$35.00, which appears to still sell at a reasonable rate per month (10-15 bins) and compares with other jurisdictions selling bins for \$35.00-\$40.00.

Through various promotional venues and workshops, Staff finds opportunities to promote the sale of the Soilsaver compost bin, the invaluable practice of home composting and the nutrient-rich soil amendment residents can make right at home, using their own organic waste.

### **Home Composting Certification**

To provide another incentive for backyard composting, the Franchise Agreement with Republic Services allows for residents to “certify” their active home composting system (online application), rewarding them with a **\$4.50** credit on their quarterly Republic Services bill (**\$18.00** per year) for reducing organic waste at the curb. There are currently **1,977** certified home composters in the RecycleSmart service area – **an increase of 85 households from 2017.**

By direction from the Board, residents who certify their composting efforts through Republic Services receive a yard/fence sign to help promote “peer-to-peer” education about the practice of home composting. The signs also serve as a “Thank You” to residents who have made the effort to divert organic material by composting.

### **Promotion**

*Home Composting for Busy People!* relies on a number of different methods to promote resources, including:

- Advertising within each community
- Member Agency promotion
- RecycleSmart website and newsletter
- Social media and Nextdoor
- Farmers Markets and community events
- Community gardens and garden clubs
- Monthly workshops
- Local community groups

### **Estimate of Home Composting Diversion**

An estimate of organic material diverted from landfilling by home composting can be developed by multiplying the **1,977** Certified Home Composters in **2018** by an estimated weight of diversion per household. The estimated diversion weight is based on several assumptions made by Staff. An initial assumption is that **60%** of material placed in the **64-gallon** organics cart is *readily* compostable. Staff estimates that up to **40%** of the organic material, backyard green waste specifically, may consist of woody waste material that cannot be easily composted without use of a grinder, which most residents do not have. Given this assumption, **60%** of the organic material placed in the Organics cart can be composted in the backyard, which equates to a volume of approximately **38** gallons. Converting this to pounds, a weight to volume conversion factor of **1.57** lbs/gallon is used to provide an average *weekly* reduction of approximately **60** pounds per household. A second assumption presumes that residents actively compost **6** months, or **26** weeks, during the year. This assumption is based on information received from residents indicating that they do not compost year-round due to weather, gardening season, vacation, and other reasons. Based on active

composting for six months, **a potential diversion of approximately 1,560 pounds per resident per year is performed.**

By applying this estimate to the **1,977** Certified Home Composters in **2018**, approximately **1,542** tons (2,000 pounds per ton) of organic material was diverted.

Since the beginning of the program in 2006, approximately **15,700 tons** of organic material has been diverted.

### **Program Budget**

*Home Composting for Busy People!* operated on a **\$60,850** budget for Fiscal Year 2018-19. Costs include:

- Consulting services
- Workshops and trainings
- Educational aids and brochures
- Advertising and community outreach
- Compost bins

Dividing the program budget (**\$60,850**) by the total estimated diverted tonnage by Certified Composters in 2018 (**1,542 tons**), results in a per ton cost of approximately **\$39.00**. This per ton cost is much lower than organics materials processing costs within the Franchise Agreement with Republic Services, at **\$69.58** per ton, and the per ton costs of other RecycleSmart programs.