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Food Scraps Diversion Case Study Restaurants in Lenox, MA Lenox, MA

Summary: Lenox is a small town in the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts. A popular tourist destination, the town's population swells from 5,000 year-round residents to around 35,000 in the summer. Downtown Lenox has a variety of small restaurants that serve this large seasonal population.

At-a-Glance:

- *The Lenox Environmental Committee worked with RecyclingWorks to develop a voluntary food scraps diversion program.*
- *The scraps are delivered to Holiday Brook Farm for composting.*
- *Because of route density, pickups cost 10%-15% less.*

Prior to 2015, only a few large institutions in Berkshire County, such as Price Chopper Supermarkets and Fairview Hospital, diverted food scraps for composting. The Lenox Environmental Committee (LEC), with assistance from RecyclingWorks, helped smaller food establishments affordably contract with an organics hauler for their food scraps. Eight Lenox restaurants now divert their food scraps, which are hauled away by Empire Zero Waste, and delivered to Holiday Brook Farm for composting.

Outreach and Implementation: The Lenox Environmental Committee is a volunteer citizens' group that promotes environmentally sound policies and practices in the Town of Lenox. When the Massachusetts Commercial Organics Waste Ban went into effect in October of 2014, the LEC decided to try to encourage small restaurants in town to divert their food scraps. Since the ban only applies to entities that dispose of one ton or more of organics each week, these small restaurants are not subject to the ban. The LEC's goal was to encourage smaller foodservice businesses to voluntarily participate in organics diversion.



RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts, which offers free technical assistance to help businesses and institutions reduce waste, collaborated with the LEC to make food scraps diversion easy and affordable for small restaurants in the area. RecyclingWorks connected the LEC with Empire Zero Waste, an organics hauler that was already servicing larger entities in the Berkshires.

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The Chair and Secretary of the LEC, Eric Federer and Susan May, began outreach by speaking directly to restaurant owners with whom they had an existing relationship. They first met with Aurelien Telle and Stephane Ferioli, who collectively own three restaurants in town: Alta Restaurant & Wine Bar, Church Street Café, and Frankie's Ristorante Italiano. With their strong commitment to both the town and farm-to-table dining, Telle and Ferioli were happy to return their food scraps to the community in the form of compost. Another restaurant owner that signed on to the program early was John McNinch of the Heritage Tavern. The Tavern, which had already been diverting its fryer grease for biodiesel, signed on early to divert their own food scraps, as well

as make their organics collection carts available for use by a few other foodservice businesses on their block.

Once they had a core group of restaurants on board, the LEC contacted other restaurants in town. The committee also met with the Director of the Lenox Chamber of Commerce to inform their membership about this opportunity to start diverting food scraps. RecyclingWorks and the LEC discussed with each restaurant how the food scraps diversion program would work. Empire Zero Waste provided training on what materials would be accepted for composting.

Empire Zero Waste began picking up organics from Lenox restaurants in the spring of 2015, just ahead of the summer peak period. Since the hauler provides ongoing feedback to the restaurants about what can and cannot be placed in the organics carts, the organic materials that Empire Zero Waste delivers to the compost site are low in contamination.

Table to Farm: The LEC created a “Table to Farm” window decal to help advertise restaurants that are composting their food scraps. Each restaurant they have worked with receives a few of these decals to display in their windows. An updated form of the decal with the current year is created annually to keep track of which restaurants are currently composting their food scraps.

Challenges: Like many volunteer-run groups, the Lenox Environmental Committee has ambitious goals but limited resources to execute their initiatives. As a result, some initiatives never make it beyond the planning stages. RecyclingWorks’ assistance was key in providing both expertise and support to help the committee achieve its goal of increasing food scraps diversion. Because the total amount of scraps generated by many restaurants is small, a single restaurant typically does not have the economies of scale necessary to save money by diverting food scraps from their trash. Coordinating a number of these small foodservice businesses to start diverting food scraps at the same time minimized the cost for organics hauling.



Empire Zero Waste is able to charge 10-15% less per pickup because the businesses are in close proximity.

Evaluation: Route density is an important factor in making organics hauling affordable for small entities. Because the LEC and RecyclingWorks coordinated a number of businesses in close proximity to start diverting food scraps at the same time, Empire Zero Waste was able to charge 10 to 15% less per pickup than they would have if any one business had signed up alone.

The collaboration between the Lenox Environmental Committee’s outreach and community connections, and RecyclingWorks’ expertise in food scraps diversion, was an effective method of encouraging a number of foodservice businesses that are not subject to the Commercial Organics Waste Ban to voluntarily divert food scraps. This model of cooperation between local environmental groups and RecyclingWorks could be replicated to increase food scraps diversion in other Massachusetts towns.

