



# Restaurant Composting Case Study

## Johnny's Luncheonette

A diner that has been adored by residents of Newton for 25 years, [Johnny's Luncheonette](#) offers breakfast, lunch, and dinner in a bright atmosphere with retro decor. When the current owners, Kay and Kevin Masterson, took over in 2014, they expanded the restaurant's sustainability efforts and elevated its classic diner fare to include locally-sourced ingredients. Johnny's Luncheonette is fondly referred to as the "Anytime Place for Everyone", representing the establishment's commitment to its diverse community partnerships. Along with supporting nearby farms through their intentional procurement, the diner works with local organizations to develop children's placemats that feature activities to increase consumer knowledge of sustainability, local history, and food systems, all of which encourage diners to think about how food arrives on their plate and where their leftovers end up. Johnny's thoughtful approach to their menu—which includes all-day breakfast, locally-caught white fish, nostalgic matzoh ball soup, and other treats—is not limited to their preparation and ingredients, but also encompasses responsible waste management.

### At A Glance

- Johnny's Luncheonette is a charming diner in Newton with a robust recycling system and a food scrap collection program for composting.
- The diner's creative children's placemats and patio signage offer guests the chance to engage with information related to local sustainability.
- The diner collects 600-700 pounds of food scraps per week, which are composted by [Black Earth Compost](#). Thanks to this partnership, food waste is recovered for its nutrients instead of discarded.
- Since implementing their new food scrap diversion program, Johnny's Luncheonette has showcased their composting efforts to customers and provided a positive example for their business neighbors. Johnny's is determined to minimize their environmental impact and works with local stakeholders in their efforts to do so.



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RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts is a recycling assistance program funded by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and delivered under contract by the Center for EcoTechnology that helps businesses and institutions reduce waste and maximize recycling, reuse, and food recovery opportunities.



## Reducing Waste

Johnny's Luncheonette contacted RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts (RecyclingWorks) to evaluate possible improvements to their recycling system and support the implementation of a food scraps collection program. RecyclingWorks Environmental Specialists recommended a few ease-of-use improvements to their existing single-stream recycling system, such as optimized placement and color coding of their recycling bins. With staff already accustomed to a system of designated bins for recycling, a food scrap separation process was easy to introduce. To facilitate education around the improved waste diversion programs, RecyclingWorks helped Johnny's Luncheonette design multilingual signage to identify acceptable and non-acceptable items for food scraps and recycling receptacles.

With a drive to reduce waste and protect the planet, Johnny's Luncheonette enthusiastically works wasted food diversion and recycling into their daily operations. Furthermore, as a restaurant generating nearly one half-ton of food waste per week, Johnny's Luncheonette is an example for businesses and institutions subject to the MassDEP commercial organics waste ban that are seeking alternative ways to manage their food waste. [Starting November 1, 2022, the threshold for businesses to comply with this ban will drop from 1 ton to ½ ton of food waste per week, requiring more businesses to reduce their food waste.](#)

**FOOD SCRAPS**  
**RESTOS DE ALIMENTOS**

**ALL FOOD SCRAPS**  
Fruit & vegetable peels  
Dairy, eggs, grains, bread  
Meat, fish, poultry  
Bones, shells



**TODOS LOS RESTOS DE ALIMENTOS**  
Pielles de frutas y vegetales  
Lácteos, huevos, granos, pan  
Carne, pescado, aves  
Huesos, cáscaras

**NO**  
Tissues, napkins, paper towels  
Compostableware  
Coffee cups, wrappers  
Plastic, metal, glass



**NO**  
Pañuelos de papel, servilletas, papel toalla  
Utensilios compostables  
Taza de café, envoltorios  
Plástico, metal, cristal







## Composting: What Goes Around Comes Around

Johnny's Luncheonette is a high-volume diner with limited kitchen space. In the bustling kitchen, five-gallon buckets are conveniently located at prep stations to recover pre-consumer scraps. Due to the configuration of the restaurant, the dishwashing staff carry out the plate-scraping and separation of post-consumer food scraps. Any non-food items are removed from the plate and discarded, then the food scraps are scraped into additional five-gallon buckets at the dishwashing station. Multilingual signage is displayed to aid the food scrap separation process, guiding new and existing team members.

Once full, the five-gallon buckets are emptied into 48-gallon outdoor carts. The carts are lined with compostable bags, which are held in place using old bicycle tire tubes. Three of these carts are picked up by Black Earth Compost weekly. After Johnny's Luncheonette started separating food waste from the trash, staff noticed fewer birds, squirrels, and other unwanted intruders around their trash dumpsters. Kay Masterson, a co-owner of Johnny's Luncheonette, remarked, **"Composting was easier than I thought it was going to be."**

Black Earth Compost delivers food scraps to their three large-scale composting operations. The resulting soil amendment is applied to local gardens and yards. To close their restaurant's loop, Johnny's Luncheonette plans to apply Black Earth's soil amendment to the planters on their outdoor patio next season. Signage on the planters links to Black Earth's website, showing guests the connection between their plates' food scraps and the nutrients that feed the flowers beside them.

By launching a new program well in advance of the lowered threshold for the MassDEP commercial organics waste ban, Johnny's Luncheonette had room for trial and error without pressure. In Kay's words, **"It is important to celebrate small successes, encourage staff to get on board with this good work and avoid getting caught up in small imperfections."**

**"If you're diverting most of what you can, you're doing a great job."**

- Kay Masterson  
Co-Owner of Johnny's Luncheonette





## Community Engagement

Johnny's Luncheonette uses its experience with composting and recycling to reach beyond its internal operations, making waste diversion a communal effort and learning process.

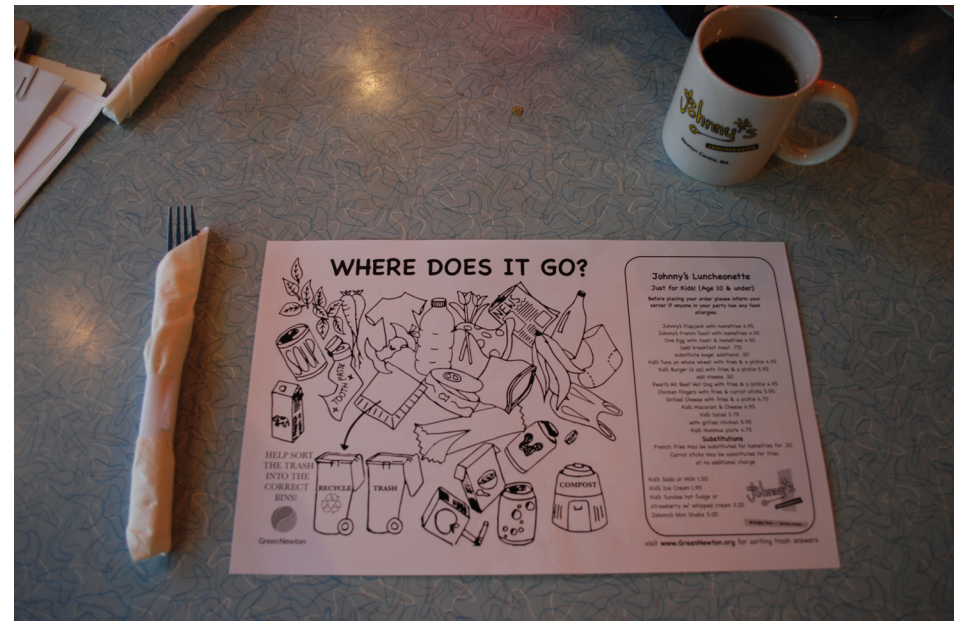
Johnny's Luncheonette has a strong relationship with [Green Newton](#), a local climate advocacy organization. For decades, the two have partnered on community education efforts that promote sustainability. Johnny's Luncheonette worked with Green Newton to create a few of the diner's signature activity placemats. One of these placemats features a dynamic array of materials, including flowers, milk cartons, and textiles, and asks whether each belongs in the recycling, compost, or trash.

The diner's next educational placemat will dive into the natural process of composting, demonstrating a compost recipe and showing how microorganisms break down organic matter. These placemats engage the diner's younger audience in topics that are important to the diner and the wider community.

After noticing an excess of five-gallon buckets, storage staples for many restaurants, the diner initiated a bucket giveaway program in honor of Earth Day. When surplus buckets arise, staff repurpose them within the restaurant or place them at the entryway to the diner under a sign that says FREE, keeping these practical containers in a cycle of reuse.

In addition to harboring community knowledge and resources, Johnny's Luncheonette aims to encourage other businesses in

the area through their demonstrated success. Reflecting on the wider impacts of Johnny's composting program, Kay said: **"If other restaurants see how much [food waste] we're diverting and learn about what Black Earth does... it's such a virtuous cycle, and it's great to be a part of it."**



**"Imagine if all restaurants were composting—what could we take on next?"**

**- Kay Masterson  
Co-Owner of Johnny's Luncheonette**



## Clean Plate to Clean Bins

In reducing the amount of food waste sent for disposal, Johnny's Luncheonette plays a direct part in easing the impacts of climate change—a concern on many customers' minds. The recycling and food scrap separation systems operating in the background of the restaurant are foregrounded through educational placemats and planter signage. The staff's handle on the established diversion systems generates clean streams of recoverable material for their end sites. Johnny's Luncheonette connects with their community and patrons on waste recovery efforts, supporting sustainability at both the restaurant and city scales.

Food waste diversion programs can make waste systems cleaner overall. This is because food scraps are contained in separate carts with tight-fitting lids, and these carts are usually picked up more frequently than trash. Additionally, diverting food scraps and recycling from trash dumpsters sometimes enables businesses to reduce their trash pickup frequency which results in a direct financial benefit.



**"If we can take these small actions, we can solve a larger problem."**

- Kay Masterson  
Co-Owner of Johnny's Luncheonette



## RecyclingWorks Resources:

- [Source Separation Guidance](#)
- [Business Sector Guidance: Restaurants](#)
- [Hauler Contracting Guidance](#)
- [Source Reduction Guidance](#)
- [Food Waste Estimation Guide](#)

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- Kay Masterson  
Co-Owner of Johnny's Luncheonette



## Connect With RecyclingWorks:

Contact RecyclingWorks to learn more about **free technical assistance** opportunities.  
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