

Minutes of the Putnam County Residential Composting Task Force Meeting

January 10, 2025

The third meeting of the Putnam County Residential Composting Task Force was called to order at 11:21 a.m.

Members' Present

In Person: Ilona Campo, Barbara Barosa, Joe Montuori, Jen Lerner, Jen Caruso

Microsoft Teams: Shanna Siegel, Ervin Raboy (Pleasant View Farm)

1. Discuss: New Solid Waste Coordinator – Savannah Usher

- Starting Monday, January 13th
- Jen L. would like to set up a preliminary meeting with Savannah to discuss CCE composting goals.
- Priority is updating the County's Solid Waste Management Plan. Her first task will be to contact DEC to get guidance on Plan components.
- Shanna will introduce her to the Planning Dept. staff.

2. Discuss: DEC Grant Project Ideas/Brainstorm Session

- In the past Composting Task Force meeting we discussed the upcoming NYSDEC [Municipal Food Scraps Recycling Grant Program](#) with a 75% (DEC) 25% (County) match due January 31st, 2025.
- The Extended Aerated Static Pile (EASP) method, using O2 Compost's designs, was explored for use at Tilly Foster. UCRRA had a great experience using O2, however, Ervin (Farm Manager at Pleasant View Farm) had a negative experience with them as they installed a system they designed at his farm in Brewster circa 2010.
- Ervin shared his feedback as to why the EASP project was unsuccessful including:
 - WAC installed three of O2's designed systems in different locations, none of them worked and were all discontinued within a few years.
 - The forced air system (see pic) was way too small for the size of the structure. The system consisted of perforated pipes in three rows in each bay which were then covered by wood slatted floors. These floors were clogged by the compost piles laid on top which prevented air flow through the bottom.
 - The slanted roof design was also a poor choice because while intended to control rainwater runoff, there was not enough water getting into the piles themselves (an essential part of composting). As a result of the dry piles, PVF installed a separate 1,000+ gallon water storage tank that still couldn't keep up.
 - The wooden floor slats started rotting (organic material after all), didn't hold up against heavy machinery, and required frequent replacements.
 - **Conclusion:** The project was too much maintenance on a large scale but may work better on a smaller scale with a different design. Static piles may also perform better.



- Ervin also mentioned [McEnroe's Organic Farm](#) in Dutchess County which ships organic compost across the country. They use the very reliable static pile/windrow method on a large pad (see pic) which piles then get turned by a tractor with an auger attachment. Ervin reiterated that this method is not meant for a semi-walled structure, it's much easier with an open static pad and a front loader. Barbara questioned whether or not DEP would have a problem with static piles due to runoff, Ervin said no they often prefer/ approve installation of these types of projects (concrete pads with designated runoff areas). Nearby, Ryder Farm uses this method too.



- There is an existing concrete pad available at Tilly Foster (see pic) which is currently underutilized and only being used to compost manure and store wood chips. The pad was originally designed for more farm animals, but at the moment we only have three alpacas and two horses. Jen L. mentioned there is room to the right to extend the pad if needed.



- Ervin brought up the concern of infectious disease potential if the piles are not pasteurized at the right temperature for the right length of time to kill off pathogens. Anything that's touched a human mouth should not be added to piles that are intended to act as soil amendments for edible crops (landscaping and animal feed pastures should be ok). Again, this pilot project is intended for food scrap diversion.
- Jen L. also mentioned that Cornell has the Waste Management Institute, she suggested that Jean Bonhotal can advise more on project ideas and be an asset. Jean and George also worked for WAC and originally to help design Ervin's system.
- Ervin also mentioned food scraps will be easier to compost than wood chips as breaking down wood requires a fungal stage. Jen L. mentioned there is a lot of carbon already with the hay mixed in with the manure. The current manure/wood chip compost operation at Tilly Foster is not great.
- A good amount of manpower will be needed to operate equipment, manage collections, and monitor the process.
- Ervin reiterated that there is a significant difference between wintertime and summertime composting. There could be a three month turnaround during summer and a tarp may be needed in the winter.
- What do DEP/DEC restrictions look like?
- **Compost Machines:** Also discussed during the September 2024 meeting, using a compost machine (controlled environment) to dehydrate and grind food scraps then adding the finished product to a static pile is another option, but the ultimate goal is to be able to scale up collections. Having several machines at different facilities that can produce a shelf stable (carbon heavy) product that can help eliminate the 'yuck' factor and encourage participation. We can also explore having solar be the main energy source to run these machines or even just installing them at county-owned facilities that have solar installed/soon to be installed (Kern, COB, DBS 1,2,3, Transit Facility). The machines range in price and capacity but don't seem too expensive. Perhaps we can use indoor machines for collection at county-owned offices and windrow piles for larger food scrap sources (i.e. jail, senior center, restaurant, etc.) at a later date. Jen L. read an article that confirmed that the final product the machines produce is just dehydrated food scraps that when rehydrated attract flies, animals, etc. and will need to be composted again. Can we mix the rehydrated product with the manure and wood chips? Again, **what will the end product be intended for?**

- CCE continues to encourage backyard composting as **the closer the pile is to the source the smaller the energy/carbon footprint.**
- Something to keep in mind is that **we can only scale up with the use of a concrete pad** and it's best to build off an existing one (Tilly). CCE already uses the manure pad as a demonstration site for their compost programs.
- **Collection:** The black, backyard compost bins that Health sells do not have a bottom so we cannot use them as collection bins (i.e. can't haul them away on a truck). Rolling bins might be better or a countertop bin which is then dumped into a bucket on a hauling truck. Again, we need dedicated staff time to help with collections. **Collection remains the biggest hurdle.**
- There is a general experience consensus that people will only comply/adopt new behavior if the process is not too gross or troublesome.
- Rats can be an issue on farm compost operations but not always on smaller scale ones.
- **Conclusion:** There is still much to explore and consider when it comes to a pilot program. We will hold off on applying for the DEC grant for now until we have a solid project plan. Alternatively, we can shift focus to providing residents with a food scrap drop-off collection program first. Joe mentioned that there was a similar state-funded food scrap compost grant available last year so there is a good chance this is a reoccurring program. Climate Smart grants are also available on an annual basis if need be (50/50 match).

3. Other Business / Comments

- The Task Force expressed interest in taking a field trip to other facilities that have food scrap recycling operations such as McEnroe's Farm.
- Angelina Brandt from UCRRA mentioned [NYSARRR](#) and [USCC](#) can also be good resources.
- We can either go big with collections from the senior centers, schools, jails, etc. or go small with collections from the County offices to start.
- Local hauler Curbside Compost services Shop Rite and TOPS and passes by Tilly Foster.
- Farms are not recommended alternative locations for composting operations as the process is time intensive and not cost effective.
- Jen L. reiterated that paper shreds (white, non-shiny) compost quite well for landscaping purposes.
- WAC staff may not be around to help anymore.

4. Action Items:

- Follow up with Ervin about NRCS comments, they helped design PVF's other composting system.
- Jen L. will reach out the Jean for guidance.
- Research pros and cons of compost machines.
- Ilona will send out the next meeting invite and include Savannah and Jean to the discussion.

Meeting adjourned at 12:28 p.m.

Next meeting tentatively scheduled for Friday, February 28, 2025 at 10am