NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. | Climate Smart Communities

PE5 Action: Organics Management Plan

2 — 16 Points

A. Why is this action important?

Wasted food is one of the largest generators of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions globally. Additionally, 43% of all food waste occurs at the household level in the U.S., which reinforces the value of widespread, community-level involvement in organics solutions to help mitigate climate change.

Under the Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Certification Program, municipalities have the ability to receive points for implementing organics-related actions. There are three different certification actions under Pledge Element 5 that explicitly relate to the management of organics and/or food scraps. Point values range from 1 to 22, with a total of 27 points possible across the three actions. These actions may require investments in labor or capital to be successful. Taking the time to plan can improve effectiveness and often lowers costs. Planning also supports implementation over the long term and can prevent narrow, one-off initiatives that ultimately have a small impact.

Additionally, there is a NYS Food Scraps Law becoming effective in 2022, which will affect large food scraps generators in each community across the state. This is an opportunity to create plans to support these generators with complying with the new law through improved awareness, technical assistance, and access to local recovery outlets.

B. How to implement this action

Given the variability in effort involved in implementing different organics management strategies, the type of planning needed will vary as well. When developing a plan, consider using the US EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy to guide decision making and priority setting. For example, preventing wasted food is at the top of the hierarchy. Not only does prevention save on costs, it reduces the impacts associated with the upstream production of food (i.e., the resources used in farming, processing, transportation, and storage) and disposal (e.g., GHG emissions from landfills). Most municipalities can offer some type of support to local residents, institutions, and businesses through outreach, education and training on techniques to prevent wasted food.

An organics management plan can be a standalone document or be a section in an existing solid waste management plan, sustainability plan, or other related municipal planning document.

Most plans should include several of the following 10 elements, but this will depend on local circumstances and priorities. At minimum, to be eligible for CSC points, plans are required to include these four elements: A record of community engagement, the goals of the program, a list of the proposed organics management strategies, and an implementation timeline.

- **Community Engagement** – Identify strategies to engage interested parties in the planning process, provide education, market the program, and receive direct feedback from the community. A variety of methods may be employed, such as paper flyers, community meetings, public events, and/or surveys. Community feedback is valuable throughout the planning and implementation processes. More detail about community engagement tips is available in the 2016 US EPA Food Too Good to Waste Guide and the website Community-Based Social Marketing.
- **Goals** – Consider how the organics management plan may fit into the larger objectives of the community. Identify both short term and easily achievable goals as well as long term, big picture goals for the program.
- **Research** – Review the information in Section G of this action and research material published by other

community groups that have already developed plans and implemented organics management strategies.

- **Team and Supporting Partners** – Provide information about the local management team and supporting partners (e.g., volunteer base, technical resources, funding partners). Research what neighboring communities are implementing and what resources are available in the region; there may be an opportunity to leverage existing educational materials or other resources (e.g., food rescue organizations, organics haulers).
- **Organics Management Strategies** – Examine the types of strategies in the table below in Section E. After gathering information and evaluating the options that best suit the local context, the plan must list the strategies that will be implemented in the community to improve the management of organics and reduce GHG emissions.
- **Expected Participants** – Describe who the intended audience or participants are for the various management strategies included in the plan and how they will be identified prior to implementation. For example, if a pilot food waste collection program will occur with a set number of households, where will the management team look to identify volunteers?
- **Data Collection** – Gather appropriate data and information. Depending on what types of strategies are to be implemented, baseline data (e.g., estimates of food waste generation by residents) can be valuable when trying to right size a community-operated program or facility.
- **Evaluation of Strategies** – If a feasibility study or other analysis is being performed as a part of the plan, summarize the process to evaluate the strategies and analyze outcomes. This type of evaluation can be crucial when assessing projects that require capital investment.
- **Resource Needs and Budget** – Document potential resource needs (staff and volunteer time, equipment, and other material requirements) and corresponding budget for each management strategy element being addressed under the plan.
- **Implementation Steps and Timeline** – A plan is just a list of good ideas unless there are clear steps to that support action and the implementation of the plan. Describe the proposed timeline, who is responsible for execution, and how feedback will be gathered from the community during each step of the process.

C. Time frame, project costs, and resource needs

There are different levels of difficulty depending the community's goals, what resources it has access to, and the local government structure. Effort may take a few months to perform such activities as engaging stakeholders, benchmarking, and documenting tasks, timeline, and budget. More complex plans may span greater than a year. The longer timelines typically involve conducting a feasibility study, evaluating various engineering solutions, or performing a community wide waste assessment, etc. The use of outside consultants to perform engineering analyses, collect community wide data, etc. may lead to higher project costs. Not all planning should require the use of a consultant and will depend on scale of the effort and intended outcomes.

Below are examples of several local governments that have implemented planning activities focused on organics management.

- In 2017, City of Kingston ($62,960) and Sullivan County ($77,500) awarded funding through Climate Smart Communities grants to develop plans.
- In 2018, a few municipalities received grants for organics-related plans and/or feasibility studies from the NYS DEC Division of Materials Management. These projects included the following:
    - City of Rochester: awarded funding for a city-led feasibility study for organics recycling for $104,400
    - Oswego County: awarded funding to do a comprehensive feasibility study to evaluate implementing a county-wide composting facility, wasted food prevention and reduction education and outreach for $50,000
    - Westchester County: awarded funding to evaluate incorporating food waste recycling into the local solid waste management plan, including what food waste management options would work best for $99,850

D. Which local governments implement this action? Which departments within the local government are most likely to have responsibility for this?

This action is applicable to all types of local governments. Planning departments or offices that lead climate and/or sustainability efforts in coordination with departments that oversee solid waste and/or recycling are often responsible for managing the planning processes. Cross-department involvement and support are recommended. Local staff with expertise in facilitating stakeholder engagement, such as public relations officers or communications staff, are important in coordinating the public outreach component of the process. The local CSC coordinator and CSC task force should play key roles in the creation of the organic waste management plan and in monitoring implementation.

Urban, suburban, and rural communities may face different circumstances associated with implementing a management strategy. Feasibility of certain elements and overall priority areas may be shaped by factors such as size and scale constraints, proximity to certain partners (e.g., food banks or farms), and solid waste management structure. Resources and case studies that reflect some of this diversity are provided below.

E. How to obtain points for this action

Municipalities can become eligible for points under this action through the creation of a plan that, at minimum, includes the four required elements described in Section B above.

Points for this action are tiered based on the scope of the organics management strategies included in the plan. None of these tiers are mutually exclusive so the maximum points possible is 16. The eight tiers of points generally follow the US EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy.

The plan must have been created (or updated) within five years prior to the application date. The plan must be adopted by the municipality and is currently available online for public viewing.

	POSSIBLE POINTS
(Prevention) Strategy to educate residents and/or local businesses on preventing wasted food and techniques to reduce the volume of surplus food in the community.	2 points
(Feed People) Strategy to support, facilitate and/or educate community on food recovery (including gleaning) and food donation by working with local food banks, soup kitchens, and shelters to prioritize feeding people.	2 points
(Feed Animals) Strategy to collaborate with local agricultural organizations to facilitate the diversion of food scraps to feed animals in the community, such as livestock and poultry.	2 points
(Recycling) Strategy to implement one or more of the following: 1) a community-wide curbside pick-up yard waste program (with pick-up at least two times a year), 2) compost bins for residents (including an educational program on home composting), or 3) compost collection in government buildings (covering a minimum of 10% of the square footage of municipal buildings). Please note: The maximum points available for this tier is limited to 2, even if a community develops a plan for more than one of the three strategies included this tier.	2 points
(Recycling) Strategy to establish a drop-off food waste program	2 points
(Recycling) Strategy to develop a pilot curbside pick-up food waste collection program	2 points
(Recycling) Strategy to establish a community-wide curbside pick-up food waste collection program	2 points
(Recycling) Strategy to establish a municipally-run food waste recycling facility (e.g., anaerobic digestion or large-scale composting)	2 points

F. What to submit

Submit an organics management plan, published in the last five years, that includes, at minimum, the following four elements (see above for a description of these elements):

1. A record of community engagement
2. The goals of the program
3. A list of the proposed organics management strategies
4. An implementation timeline

Provide documentation the plan was adopted by the municipality and is currently available online for public viewing.

All CSC action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submittals should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

G. Links to Additional Resources or Best Practices

- NYS DEC Composting and Organics Recycling for Municipalities
- District of Columbia 2017 Feasibility Study
- City of Cambridge, MA, Curbside Organics Collection from Residents Phase 1 Report, 2012
- 2009 Rural/Small Town Organics Management Case Study – Hamilton and Wenham MA Curbside Composting Program
- NYSP2I Planning Guide: Food Waste Management in your Community
- NRDC Tackling Food Waste in Cities
- Westchester County 2020 Feasibility Study
- 2014 Organic Materials Management & Composting for Rural, Small, and Tribal Communities
- 2016 US EPA Food Too Good to Waste Guide
- Harvard Law School Legal Fact Sheet - New York Food Donation: Liability Protections
- Harvard Law School Legal Fact Sheet - New York Feeding Food Scraps to Animals
- Harvard Law School Legal Fact Sheet - New York Food Donation: Date Labels
- Harvard Law School Legal Fact Sheet - New York Food Donation: Tax Incentives

H. Recertification requirements

The recertification requirements are the same as the initial certification requirements.