

Californians throw away more than 6 million tons of food scraps each year! That's about 15 percent of landfill material coming from businesses, residents, and institutions such as schools and prisons. There are ways to minimize food waste. Some communities, like Santa Cruz, have begun a creative collaboration with restaurants and residents.

SOUND BITE: Dan De Grassi, Public Works, County of Santa Cruz. "The county of Santa Cruz has a zero waste goal, part of which includes a seventy-five percent diversion milestone by the year 2010. We have a number of diversion programs going; curbside recycling, commercial recycling, C & D recycling, uh, we contract we non-profits to run community drop off recycling centers, and, we have found that, um, food waste comprises about thirty percent of our waste stream.

We decided to implement a food waste composting program. We are working with about thirty five businesses, ah, restaurants, grocery stores, schools, some group homes, residential care facilities. We provide the collection at a reduced rate, that's lower than the cost of regular refuse collection, so, a business that participates in the program can actually save money on their overall refuse disposal bill. We do a number of things to help the generator, we provide them with special collection cans that go in their kitchen, uh, we provide them with signage, uh, as you can see behind me, um, we provide them with training when they join the program so they know what's okay to go in, what's not okay to go in, and we provide them biodegradable liners because our health department wants the kitchen containers lined, and uh, rather than use plastic liners which will create a problem down the line, uh, we're supplying them with corn starch, uh, liners, biodegradable liners, uh, that decompose with all the food. We have also received a grant from the Board, uh, to purchase some Earth Tubs which we provided to the California Grey Bears, uh, and that was a very successful operation."

SOUND BITE: Karin Grobe, Grey Bears Food Scrap Program. "The 'Grey Bears Earth Tub Project'. These are tubs were acquired about five years ago, through a grant from the State Waste Board, could put three and a half cubic yards of waste in here, and what comes out is beautiful compost.. The Grey Bears actually improved the bottom line of this project by selling the compost for two dollars per bucket and it's been an incredibly popular product with people who want to improve their gardens.

We're here at Michael's on Main in Santa Cruz County and Michael is filleting a salmon. He is able to put all of the excess food, like the skin and the bone, into the food waste recycling. The food waste recycling is a special program of the County. The food waste is collected three times a week and it goes to a compost site where it will be turned into fine products for landscapers and gardeners, and the food waste can include such items as meat, bones, wax coated cardboard, as well as all the other things that you would expect to see in a compost program. The restaurants have reduced their refuse by up to two thirds, most have reduced their refuse by at least one half, and we find that most restaurants have about fifty percent food waste and soiled paper and about fifty percent regular garbage."

SOUND BITE: Dan De Grassi, Public Works, County of Santa Cruz. "We're at the County of Santa Cruz, uh, Buena Vista landfill compost food waste compost site, and, the materials delivered here by our collection vehicles that pick up from schools and restaurants, grocery stores, and, as soon as it arrives it is covered with ground yard waste in order to keep the birds off. Once we have enough to process into a bag, we shred it to about the size of your little finger, and then we have a machine that places it into these elongated plastic bags. Air is blown through, the right amount of air creates the perfect environment for the bacteria to do their work. It's in the bag for about twelve to fourteen weeks and then we screen it and the finished product is right here, available for sale.

A great way to handle surplus food is by returning the food back to the community in the form of a food 2 donation. By law, donors are protected from liability as long as they donate the food in good faith.

SOUND BITE: Ernie Brown, Director, Public Relations, Senior Gleaners, Inc. “Uh, we are a food bank that’s located in Sacramento, however we serve hungry people through northern California and northern Nevada. Uh, we process about twenty million pounds of food a year which we rescue from grocery stores and other food outlets and we process it here so it doesn’t end up in the landfill. And we package it into smaller containers that are then available to the charities to take away to feed their people. What we can’t use, uh, we recycle through a machine which pelletizes it and it’s sold for animal food.”

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