

Case Study: LA Compost- Healing Soil, Environment and Community

LA Compost began in 2013 as a food waste diversion service, with a bicycling collection crew towing trailers around 4 cities and picking up organic material from restaurants, homes, and schools. Within five months, these volunteers hauled over 30,000 pounds of organic material to local compost centers. Today, LA Compost continues to work in the spirit of community collaborations central to their initial model of local compost centers. Now, the central mechanisms are community compost hubs-- where organic material is



Photo Source: Flickr

composted in the same community it was consumed in. This minimizes the cycle of consumption, to waste, to compost material. As a food waste diversion service, LA Compost mitigates the amount of food waste going to landfills and repurposes it to restore healthy soils. This short case study highlights LA Compost' unique approach as one of the few community composting hubs serving the Los Angeles area.

The Case for Composting

In Los Angeles, over one million tons of organic matter—food scraps, yard trimmings and other compostable materials—are thrown away each yearⁱ. Nationally, Americans spend \$218 billion a year to grow, process, transport and dispose of food that ultimately gets wastedⁱⁱ. This accumulation of waste contributes to methane emissions which are 25 times more potent than carbon dioxideⁱⁱⁱ. Diverting food from landfills through food recovery, food redistribution and/or composting reduces air pollution and protects the environment.

Composting also benefits the soil by replenishing nutrients, much of which has been eroded through urban development and unsustainable agriculture practices. Healthier soils contribute to increased water retention in the soil, a significant benefit for our vulnerable local water supply. Composting also brings about positive economic impacts since on a per-ton-basis, composting creates twice as many jobs as landfills^{iv}. These jobs are often safer, higher paid and a better quality means of employment.

Reducing Food Waste, Restoring Healthy Soils + Building Community

Community compost hubs have numerous benefits, from soil regeneration to community education. Their role is essential in the cultivation of a thriving local food system, by lessening the gap between food waste and soil production. Compost hubs lessen the environmental impacts of food waste by both diverting the organic material from landfills, and also reducing the number of miles food waste must travel before it is recycled.



Photo Source: LA Compost

LA Compost's work is exemplary of holistic sustainability by engaging youth, adults and elders together in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from food waste and nourishing our soil to grow better, healthier food that nourishes our bodies. Beyond simply diverting food waste from landfills, the community compost hubs serve an important role as centers of education and advocacy, informing residents about the benefits of composting. The local spaces and partnerships they nurture allow community members to learn about composting, drop off their food scraps, and participate in events and gardening projects.

LA Compost currently has 9 community compost hubs in the Greater Los Angeles area, with 10 more planned for completion before the end of 2018 and a growing waiting list of 50 more hubs throughout the region. With the addition of 10 more compost hubs, LA Compost aims to divert close 150,000 pounds from Los Angeles' landfills and distribute 5,000 pounds of healthy, fresh compost to impacted communities throughout the region. This compost distribution will help grow more nutritious edible plants with higher yields to better nourish communities that need healthy food most.

Since Los Angeles' local organics recycling infrastructure is sparse, disconnected and not rooted in community, LA Compost fills a gap by connecting communities to organics recycling at the neighborhood level. Strategies aimed at expanding the LA Compost model as a mechanism for bolstering Los Angeles' local organic waste recycling infrastructure can lead to positive impacts in food waste diversion, greenhouse gas emissions, soil health and healthy food access.

With 10 new compost hubs in the works, LA Compost aims to divert close to 150,000 lbs of waste from LA landfills

LA Compost reconnects community members with the soil that feeds them, reminding communities that healthy soil is where good food grows from, the basis of a thriving local food system for current and future generations to come

ⁱ Don't Waste LA, *Zero Waste LA Franchise Ordinance: Transforming the Waste and Recycling System for the Commercial and Multi-Family Sectors*

ⁱⁱ ReFED Report: www.refed.com

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization, *Food Wastage Footprint, 2013*.

^{iv} Wasting and Recycling in the United States, Institute for Local Self-Reliance (Platt and Seldman, 2000)