

Mr. Sheil Carlson
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Dear Mr. Carlson:

Thank you for the electronic message you sent on June 22, 1999 expressing your support for yard waste composting and your concern over the apparent lack of funding for such projects. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has encouraged recycling, including composting, and other resource conservation approaches since the passage of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) in 1976. EPA has been particularly active in the field of recycling over the past 10 years - a period where the national recycling rate has increased from the low teens to more than 25 percent recycling of municipal solid waste.

The management of municipal solid waste (MSW) has historically come under the purview of state and local authorities since the types and extent of waste management concerns vary from region to region. EPA currently does not have statutory authority under RCRA to establish regulations for recycling or source reduction nor, do we have authority to provide funding directly to companies engaged in recycling.

EPA does make funding available for recycling projects, including composting, through our Municipal Solid Waste Assistance Program. This program provides limited funding to help solve municipal solid waste generation and management problems at the local, regional, and national levels. Projects eligible for funding include the following types of activities: training, public education programs, studies, and demonstrations. Funding under this program, however, is restricted to nonprofit organizations. Over the years, this program has provided funding for compost-related projects.

EPA has made a concerted effort to promote composting and the innovative use of compost as a technology for erosion control, turf remediation, bioremediation of contaminated soils, and pollution prevention. We recently issued a series of fact sheets explaining many cutting-edge projects that use compost to help protect human health and the environment. These materials, as well as other EPA publications on composting and compost use, are available on our internet site at

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www.epa.gov/compost. It is our hope that these materials will eventually help expand the end-use markets for all types of compost. We are also working with the U.S. Compost Council on issues of significance to the compost industry. As an example, we are funding efforts by the Council to develop standards for commercial compost. This project is just now starting and is expected to continue over the next year or two.

EPA also supports initiatives which build the capacity of state and regional authorities to foster recycling and reuse businesses that use recyclable and reusable materials which would otherwise be incinerated or landfilled. This includes compost businesses. In 1994, EPA launched a major new initiative, "Jobs Through Recycling," with the goal to stimulate economic growth and recycling market development in urban and rural areas while providing the environmental benefits associated with recycling. As part of this initiative, EPA selected states to provide assistance to existing businesses to help them convert to using recovered materials as feedstock. The states also facilitate development of new businesses based on the use of recovered materials. This program has been used to fund compost projects in the past and will continue to consider opportunities in this area. More information on the "Jobs Through Recycling" program is available on the internet at www.epa.gov/jtr.

Many states also have proactive programs to promote composting of yard waste and other materials, some of which include the availability of grants and other financial assistance programs. To date, 23 states have issued land disposal bans on yard waste which provides a tremendous opportunity for composting. I would urge you to contact the Department of Environmental Protection in your state to find out what sort of financial assistance programs they may offer.

EPA is committed to encouraging the recovery and composting of the organic fraction of the municipal solid waste stream. We believe that if significant increases in recycling are to be made, much of this increase will have to come from organics recovery, a majority of which is yard waste. I hope this information is helpful to you and allays any concerns you may have regarding the Agency's support for yard waste composting.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Cotsworth, Acting Director
Office of Solid Waste

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