



**Testimony Submitted to the Little Hoover Commission
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**Improving Support for Community Level Composting Throughout State
Oversight of Organic Waste Diversion**

LA Compost Mission and Overview

LA Compost restores lost connections to the soil and one another. Cooperatively with a diverse network of partners across LA County, we co-create spaces for local compost access and engagement, restorative practices, and community empowerment. We support a healthy transition where food is never wasted, but returned to the soil for the next cycle of life.

Our innovation to construct a decentralized human network of composters is actually based upon a process that is taking place below the ground. Just as fungal and microbial networks within our soils build vast networks of communication, resource sharing and structure, LA Compost emulates this resiliency response above ground through our decentralized network of Angelenos. In partnership with over 50 community-based organizations, LA Compost fosters inclusive climate action through diverse community engagement around composting and localized compost production to strengthen Los Angeles soils and community wellness.

Issue Statement

In 2020, of the 5.3 million tons of organic waste sent to landfill in Los Angeles County, “approximately 1.6 million tons (31 percent), 251,000 tons (five percent), and 501,000 tons (nine percent) was estimated to food waste, green waste, and

Table 4: Composition of Countywide Organic Waste Disposal

| Material | Estimated Organic Waste Percent in Disposal Stream | 2020 Countywide Solid Waste Disposal ⁵ | Estimated Organic Waste Tons in Countywide Disposal Stream |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| | A | B | C = A * B |
| Food Waste | 14.9% | 10,901,666 | 1,624,348 |
| Green Waste | 2.3% | | 250,738 |
| Landscape & Pruning Waste | 4.6% | | 501,477 |
| Wood Waste | 10.8% | | 1,177,380 |
| Paper Products | 12.2% | | 1,330,003 |
| Printing and Writing Paper | 2.9% | | 316,148 |
| Digestate | N/A | | N/A |
| Biosolids ⁶ | 1.0% | | 104,848 |
| Total | 48.7% | | 10,901,666 tons |

⁵ Source: CalRecycle's Recycling and Disposal Reporting, Report 1 "Overall Jurisdiction Tons for Landfill Disposal".



landscape and pruning waste,”¹ comprising nearly half of all organic waste sent to landfill¹.

Throwing food and carbon-based organics into landfills not only squanders water and energy, it releases potent greenhouse emissions that fuel Los Angeles’ rising temperatures, drought and wildfire emergencies. Facing disproportionate food and climate impacts are Los Angeles County’s densely populated, low income and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities, made vulnerable from historic disinvestment, environmental racism and food apartheid. Even as municipal and commercial waste haulers mobilize to meet federal and state food waste reduction requirements, their large-scale systems alone cannot foster community restoration of food systems, green spaces, and human connections to the land, soil, and one another.

LA Compost Accomplishments

Having grown from a bicycle-based volunteer program in 2013, LA Compost currently serves as one of California’s leading examples for community level composting. In 2020, LA Compost was selected as a strategic model and liaison for the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) to use community-level composting and community engagement to support soil and food production within underserved communities as a means of meeting statewide organic waste diversion goals. Additionally, with the 2021 passage of California’s AB 1826 and SB1383 organics separation and diversion legislation, LA Compost has been identified as the lead nonprofit partner by The LA City Mayor’s Office of Sustainability. We have been working to meet the City’s Green New Deal sustainability goals through providing localized food waste recovery services at all farmers’ markets in the City of Los Angeles.

LA Compost Programs and Initiatives

Educational Workshops

Our educational workshops incorporate composting education through garden demonstrations and hands-on, compost turning events for individuals. These interactive events are key as they ensure community members have a heightened understanding of their current waste system, where organics are either sent to landfill, exacerbating greenhouse gas emissions, or are driven 70 miles outside city lines for anaerobic digestion, removing them as a community resource.



Volunteer Opportunities

Our volunteer opportunities are provided on a weekly basis, where individuals can support with compost production at compost hubs, outreach during farmers' markets and other special events.

Community Leadership Programs

Our community leadership programs provide Los Angeles residents with education and training to bring community composting, food waste reduction, and soil stewardship efforts into their own neighborhoods. These programs include our Community Compost Coaching Program to provide technical assistance to communities, and our Soil Farmer Program to support South Los Angeles residents to improve their local green spaces.

Food Waste and Organics Diversion Services

Our food waste diversion services provide Los Angeles residents, businesses and organizations with opportunities to divert residual food and other organic material away from landfill and toward local production of compost for use in gardens, farms, and green spaces across Los Angeles County. Services include our Farmers' Market Drop-off Program and broader Community Partner Drop-off services as well as our Community Compost Cooperative (Co-op) Program for households to divert kitchen organics and fuel compost production at their local community gardens and greenspaces.

Compost Production and Accessibility Services

Our compost processing and production services provide Los Angeles with thousands of pounds of free, locally-produced and nutrient-dense compost soil amendment. This amendment is used by residents, urban agriculture and green space initiatives to regenerate Los Angeles soils for food production and ecosystem resilience. Services include our Community Compost Hub and Co-op Programs for households to divert kitchen organics and fuel compost production at their local community gardens and greenspaces, and our Regional Compost Hub Program, which utilizes public parks and urban farms to process large volumes of material from our food waste and organics diversion services.



Critical Role of Community Level Composting

As a former elementary school teacher and current father of two, I have witnessed how new concepts transition from thoughts, to comprehension and full understanding. One of the most powerful ways one is able to comprehend something new, is to be given the space, access, and opportunity to put what was learned into practice. Composting alongside communities does just that.

Community Composting prioritizes the element of human connection that is critical to sustaining environmental education, equity and climate resilience for generations. It gives individuals a transparent breakdown of where “waste” goes at the moment, and how we can reimagine many of these items as resources that can be reinvested in our communities. It allows participants to see the entire process from start to finish. From blending of various organic materials, witnessing the decomposition firsthand, to applying the finished compost in a green space within the community.

While environmental and public health inequities continue to be exacerbated by a global pandemic, engaging individuals through socially-distanced, outdoor, community-level composting yields the public health benefits of safe social inclusion, neighborhood beautification, bolstered ecosystem services, green workforce investments, and reduced effects from truck hauling within neighborhoods.

Additionally, community level composting prioritizes the element of human connection that is critical to sustaining environmental education, equity and climate resilience for generations. Within months, LA Compost has the ability to establish and operate community level compost infrastructure that shifts our community culture, perception and understanding of food scraps as a valuable resource for the health of living beings and the environment.

Community Composting in Public Parks and City-owned Spaces

Through community composting, we have an opportunity to lean into communities' lived experience, perspective and leadership. This opportunity takes place as we are able to engage on a deeper community level, understand the intersecting resource needs of the community, and mobilize our decentralized network of composters to reinvest resources within their own neighborhoods.

Today, we are at a place where we can reimagine existing green infrastructure across our city, and transform it to provide community-based composting opportunities.



Nationwide best practice models for community level composting include the New York Department of Sanitation - NYC Compost Project in New York², the Washington DC Department of Parks and Recreation - Community Compost Cooperative Network³, and the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation - Office of Sustainability Community Composting Network⁴.

From these models, it is evident that partnerships between city municipal departments and community cooperatives are crucial to the proliferation of community level compost initiatives within dense, urban environments. Through deeper and more collaborative engagement with the Los Angeles Department of Sanitation (LASAN) and Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (LARAP) LA Compost will be best able to leverage citywide capacity and resources for sustainable, ongoing composting initiatives that yield direct benefit to local communities, regional soils and food growing initiatives.

Localized composting within regional parks has proven to be an effective model in response to climate change and environmental injustices taking place within densely populated, urban communities. Composting within regional parks is a scaled response that synergizes the diverse ecosystems and landscapes of parks with the benefits of compost, including but not limited to soil carbon capture, soil water retention, increased nutrient and microorganism diversity, bioremediation, disease control for plants and erosion control, while making compost available to local residents for little to no cost⁵. Additionally, mid-scale composting at parks and city-owned spaces provides ample opportunity for environmental education, volunteer engagement and green workforce opportunities to remain within our communities.

Obstacles and Requests for Support

1. Expand Regulatory Permissions to Include Community Composting in Parks
CalRecycle is a champion for community and commercial scale composting statewide, and has been tasked with meeting ambitious goals to reduce organic waste and resulting greenhouse gas emissions within landfills. Through further expansion of composting infrastructure, food production and workplace development, CalRecycle and its statewide partners will promote the health equity of communities through bolstering urban ecosystem protections, and generating economic opportunity.



Although CalRecycle's current Tiered Regulatory Structure provides regulatory permissions for both small-scale and commercial, within-vessel and research composting operations, there remains to be language that clarifies the allowances for mid-scale, outdoor composting on public parklands⁶.

Therefore, we believe CalRecycle and its partners are in a prime position to work with community composters across the state to establish park tier regulations and allow for mid-scale, community composting to take place within parks across California.

2. Increase Equity-based Considerations within Government Funding Opportunities

Many community-based composting initiatives face obstacles to government funding access due to inequitable policies and funding design. Suggestions to increase equity within these opportunities include:

- Promoting equity-based districting that partition funding amounts to regions according to empirical evidence, such as population size, amount of food waste currently being sent to landfills, the cost of living, and/or the amount of priority communities.
- Changing funding allocation methods by removing reimbursement requirements for community-based initiatives and instead providing funding advancement opportunities.
- Shortening post-award approval processing time, which would ensure that community composters receive their anticipated revenue on a timely basis and can successfully meet timelines for project deliverables.

3. Increase Synergy and Collaboration with Large Scale Haulers

Oftentimes, a knowledge gap exists between large scale waste haulers and community composting groups, causing haulers to potentially view community level efforts as competition, when there is in fact room for strong collaboration. In actuality, each type of entity holds a distinctly different role in the statewide movement for food and organics waste reduction, and with greater understanding, could actually enhance one another's capacity to meet a shared goal.

Each type of organization holds unique institutional knowledge, skill sets and qualifications that serve to reach and engage residents around food waste



reduction. Community composters engage and interact with communities in a way that allows them to establish programs responsive to community needs beyond the removal of household waste. This includes community-based infrastructure, local green jobs, and a heavy focus on education, knowledge sharing and creating the space to put what was learned into practice. Meanwhile, larger haulers have greater processing capacity and streamlined logistics for waste diversion.

Suggestions to increase collaboration between larger scale and community-based composting groups include:

- Establishing subcontracts between larger haulers and community composters to service multi-family units and commercial zones, potentially through micro hauling carve outs.
- Collaborating on outreach and education programs within the community.
- Establishing workforce development plans to allow for community members to see composting as a viable career option for the future.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments and for your work on this issue. Should you have questions or wish to discuss any of these recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact me at 626-340-6249 or by email at michael@lacompost.org.

Sincerely,
Michael Martinez, Executive Director
LA Compost



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