

SOAP Action Update

Food Waste Composting at the Snohomish County Jail



Why compost food waste?

Every year, about 373 tons of food scraps is generated at the Snohomish County Jail. If all of that uneaten food is not composted, it goes straight to a landfill where it would produce about 13¹ tons of methane emissions.

Methane is the second most prevalent greenhouse gas emitted in the United States from human activities. In landfills, methane is generated as waste decomposes. Landfills are anaerobic environments (lacking oxygen) where organic materials do not decompose or decompose very, very slowly. Organic waste is the second highest component of landfills, which are the third largest source of methane emissions in the United States.

By composting food waste from the jail, Snohomish County is helping reduce our greenhouse gas emissions generated from County operations. When composted, the food waste from the County jail is turned into nutrient rich soils for growing plants and crops. Compost material also helps prevent soil erosion and absorbs carbon dioxide - another greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming.

Finally, composting saves the County money! If food waste went into the garbage (landfill) instead, Snohomish County would pay about \$25,000 more every year in garbage hauling fees.

[For more information about composting, visit this link on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's website.](#)

¹ Food waste in a landfill emits an estimated 0.035 lbs. of methane per pound (2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories).

environmental goals

Snohomish County is working to achieve the energy and resource conservation goals established in our internal **Sustainable Operations Action Plan (SOAP)** for government operations. Composting food waste at the jail is one example of how we are taking action to achieve our SOAP goals and objectives, namely:

- **Goal 4:** Reduce, Recycle, and Repurpose Waste
- **Objective 40:** Reduce waste from County facilities by 30% by the end of 2013 (or until the goal is met) against a 2011-2012 average baseline.

This project also helps meet **Objective 2E:** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from County operations to 20% below 2000 levels by 2020.

environmental benefits

Composting food waste from the jail every year Snohomish County...



Eliminates 13 tons of methane from being generated in a landfill.



Avoids the equivalent carbon dioxide emissions of 242 acres of forest providing carbon sequestration.



Diverts 373 tons of food waste from the landfill.

economic case

By composting food waste from the jail, Snohomish County saves approximately **\$25,000 annually!** Food waste is heavy and it would cost the County more money in garbage hauling and tipping fees to send food waste to a landfill than to compost it.