

SOAP Action Update

Working Towards Better Uses of Wasted Food



The Snohomish County Public Works Solid Waste Division has worked since 2006 to enhance food waste collection for composting in Snohomish County. In the division's last waste characterization study, 14.6% of the waste stream in Snohomish County was composed of food waste and residential food waste accounted for 26.6%. Starting from no service in 2006, the division partnered with Cedar Grove to provide service to the largest producers of food waste in the county, then partnered with area haulers to provide food waste collection to area businesses and add food waste to yard debris collection for residential customers.

Following the Natural Resources Defense Council's 2012 report that estimated 40% of the edible food in this country was being wasted, and with food waste composting collection service well established throughout the county, in 2014 the division turned its attention to programs that could divert edible food to food banks and hot meal programs. The division interviewed grocery stores, restaurants, and caterers to find out about wasted food and to look for opportunities to divert it. From these interviews the division determined that the local network of food banks work well to divert food such as canned goods, bakery items, and produce that still had at least several days of shelf life or food such as raw meats that could be frozen.

The division interviewed hot meal program providers in 2014 and 2015 with a view towards helping them start an organization that could serve as a collection point for highly perishable edible foods. From the results of those interviews, it appeared that partnering with social service agencies would provide the greatest opportunities. Based on this, the division will seek opportunities in the future to partner with a social service agency.



environmental goals

Snohomish County is working to achieve the sustainability goals established in our internal Sustainable Operations Action Plan (SOAP) for government operations. The composting of food waste and diversion of edible foods to programs that serve the needy are examples of how we are taking action to achieve our SOAP Goals and Objectives, namely:

- **Goal 2:** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from county operations, especially transportation.
- **Goal 4:** Reduce, recycle and repurpose waste.
- **Objective 40:** Reduce waste from county facilities.
- **Goal 6:** Promote ecological preservation and healthy ecosystems.

In addition, this action also supports Public Works Department sustainability goals to:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Maximize reduction, reuse and recycling of materials.
- Promote sustainable waste management practices.
- Support community outreach with sustainable practices or activities.
- Provide services to county residents and businesses and support a healthy environment.

environmental benefits

Composting and reuse of food . . .

- Reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills.
- Conserves natural resources.
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions.
- Supports social programs and services for residents of the county.

economic case

Diverting edible food to programs that serve the needy in Snohomish County saves money for the contributor and reduces costs to the hot meal program providers. Contributors do not have to pay to transport, dispose of, or compost edible food. Food banks and hot meal program providers benefit by receiving food stuffs they otherwise would need to purchase. Clients of food banks, guests at hot meal programs, and people with limited means, are saved the cost of buying some of the food necessary for their subsistence.