



The Waste Not

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OUR VISION

To provide Brown County municipal commercial and industrial customers cost-effective and sustainable solid waste management systems with the focus on resource recovery primarily through recycling, re-purposing and energy recovery

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New Composting App in the Works

Many residential compost or food scrap programs deal with the same contamination issues as residential recycling programs; it's hard to make sure participants are putting only acceptable materials in their carts.

A small amount of contamination in our food waste dumpster can mean that the dumpster has to go to the landfill instead of to the biodigester. In addition, any amount of contamination decreases the value of the final compost product. The challenge for staff at Brown County is finding an effective way of communicating with participants about what items are acceptable and unacceptable in the program.



In an effort to help our Food Waste Program be more successful and help our participants decide what is acceptable, we have been working with a developer to create a custom application as a new means of communicating with residents about what materials can be brought to the drop-off site.

The app, BetterBin, was created by a Wisconsin-based startup and will allow residents to search through a custom database of materials that are acceptable and unacceptable in the drop-off program.

The app is currently in the testing stage and we are hoping to have it available sometime early this summer!

To sign up for Brown County's Food Waste & Organics Drop-off Program, go to browncountyrecycling.org/program-details. The program is free and easy to use!

The Impact of Staying at Home on Local Waste Industry

Many industries and businesses across the globe, including Brown County Resource Recovery, had to adjust when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. For Resource Recovery, adjustments we had to make, dealt more with the amount and type of material coming into our facilities than any concerns about the material itself.

While the total amount of recycling coming into Brown County Resource Recovery facilities during the Safer at Home Order has not changed much, what has been different is the type of materials coming in. Typically, a large percentage of the recycled materials comes from businesses which includes a lot of glass and cardboard. When the Safer at Home Order was put into place, many local businesses reduced production or temporarily shut down. With the reduction in materials coming in from businesses, residential recycling has gone up by nearly 17%. Residential recycling typically contains a greater mix of materials with less glass and cardboard and more plastics.

Fortunately for Brown County Resource Recovery, new equipment was installed at the Material Recovery Facility in Appleton in early May to replace equipment that was more than 10 years old. The process of sorting mixed materials, specifically aluminum and plastics, is more efficient with the new equipment making the sorting process quicker as well as safer for employees who have to do less sorting by hand .

The mix of recycling isn't the only change Resource Recovery has seen during the pandemic. On the waste side, the biggest change has been the amount of material received at the Waste Transfer Station. In June 2020 the Waste Transfer Station took in 17,400 tons of material-a new record! With residents being at home, many cleaned out their garages, attics, closets and basements of unneeded materials and either donated them or brought them to the Waste Transfer

Station, Recycling Transfer Station and Hazardous Material Recovery Facility. The number of people using the recycling drop-off window each day at the Recycling Transfer Station has doubled over the last few months.

Fortunately, we have been able to handle the changes as we continue to serve the public. Like all businesses, we've not only made adjustments to our operations to accommodate the "new normal" we've also instituted health and safety measures to keep employees and visitors safe. That is truly the most important thing during these times.



Photographer: Marco Bertorello/AFP/Getty Images

For details on the health and safety measures we're taking regarding COVID-19, and to learn more about Brown County Resource Recovery facilities, visit browncountyrecycling.org.

The Most Effective Climate Change Solution

The recent celebration of Earth Day's 50th anniversary this April has put a spotlight on climate change and the various solutions that can remedy a warming world. You may have heard about solar panels, electric cars, and meatless diets as a way to combat this worldwide problem but what exactly is the most effective climate change solution?

According to Project Drawdown, a nonprofit organization that quantifies climate change strategies, reducing food waste is the single greatest solution to bring about climate change. Reducing food waste draws carbon out of the atmosphere and draws it down into the ground (where it belongs). Reducing food waste has the potential to draw 87 gigatons (GT) of CO₂ out of the atmosphere, more than a plant-based diet (64 GT), electric cars (12 GT), regenerative agricul-



Photo Credit: kwest/Shutterstock.com

ture (15 GT), even utility-scale solar panels (42 GT)!

Up to 40% of food produced for human consumption is wasted, adding up to billions of tons and hundreds of billions of dollars per year. It's the single largest contributor to municipal landfills, coming from restaurants, grocery stores, and farms themselves. Once in the landfill, the food from your fridge releases methane which is a greenhouse gas much more powerful than CO₂. So if you want to help the environment, a great way to do it is to not let food that enters your home in a grocery bag leave in a trash bag. In short, reduce the amount of food you throw out.

When you throw out a bunch of bananas you never got around to eating, the impact on the environment is not only from the methane emitted from the bananas in the landfill; the true impact comes from: the deforestation of a rainforest to make room for the corner of the farm that grows food that will never be eaten; the nutrients in the banana peel, which have value but no market; the semi-truck hauling the portion of its load destined for the trash; and the grocery store's fluorescent lights shining down on to-be-wasted produce.

The Most Effective Climate Change Solution cont.

The beauty of food waste reduction as a strategy to address climate change is that virtually anyone can participate. Here are a couple suggestions to how can you contribute to a food system in which all food goes to its highest and best use:

- Don't throw away food. To make this easier, try buying less at a time. If you eat 100% of the food you buy, you'll save more than \$1,000 per year, the average amount we spend on food we end up tossing in the trash. At the very least, food should be composted, where nutrients are retained to turn healthy soil back into food
- Donate extra food or money to food rescue organizations. An important player in food waste reduction is the network of hundreds of food rescue organizations around the world, rescuing food that would otherwise go to waste and providing it to food insecure populations. The work these organizations do is critical, especially in times of uncertainty (e.g., global pandemic)

It is important to note that while food waste reduction is one of the most important solutions doesn't mean it's the only solution. An eight percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is significant, however; if we completely eliminate food waste we're still left with the other 92% to deal with. There's still no silver bullet, but before you go spending \$15,000 on solar panels or \$100,000 on a Tesla, even small steps can help so consider reducing your food waste first.

For more information on strategies for reducing your food waste, go to browncountyrecycling.org/program-details and sign up for Brown County's Food Waste & Organics Drop-off Program. The program is free and easy to use!

Follow Us

For facts, general information and ideas on how to reduce waste, follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest! We post information you want to know several times a week.



If you are interested in reading more about a resource recovery topic online or in our newsletter let us know! We would love to hear from you.



Email us at BC_Resource_Recovery@browncountywi.gov with your idea and we will post it or include it in our next newsletter.



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