

The KITCHEN BIN BULLETIN

Brown County Food & Organics Waste Program Quarterly Newsletter

VOL. 1, NO. 1



SPRING 2020



UW-Oshkosh's Biodigester Building

History of the Program

Food waste and organic material represent the largest segment of waste that is landfilled every year throughout the country, and Brown County is no exception. Nearly 24 % of the all the material that is landfilled every year is waste that has been generated at some point in the process of growing and raising food.

In 2014, Brown County decided that we should look into ways to help reduce the amount of food waste that was going into landfills from our area. Since Brown County does not have any equipment or trucks to collect waste, we needed a process that would be relatively low cost.

EDITOR: Samantha Cooper

CONTRIBUTOR: Mark Walter

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2020 FAST STATS

Total Weight Collected:

31,200 LBS

(+14.3% from 2018)

Total Participation:

236 HOUSEHOLDS

(+25.5% from 2018)

History of the Program cont.

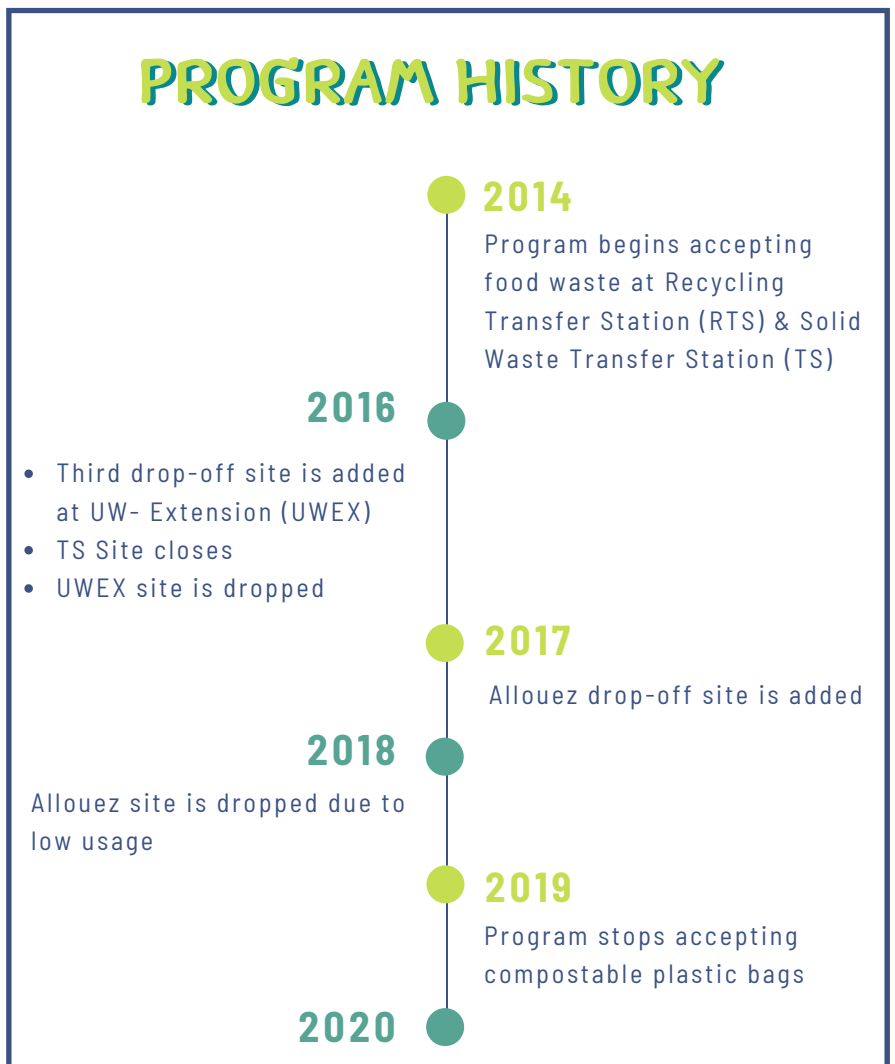
To start we toured several digesters to see how they handled waste and looked at other food waste programs throughout the country. After looking at different types of programs, we decided that a voluntary drop-off program would be the best way to get something started in our area.

Initially, we chose two sites that were owned and operated by the Resource Recovery department as drop-off locations - the Recycling Transfer Station in Ashwaubenon and the Solid Waste Transfer Station in Hobart. These locations were chosen so that we could monitor their use and limit contamination from people dumping garbage into the dumpsters. We also built a fenced enclosure for site that is located at the Recycling Transfer Station. After working with Sanimax to setup a pick-up schedule, we contacted UW- Oshkosh biodigester staff to make sure that our program only accepted material that they would accept at their biodigester.

Finally, in late summer 2014, we began to sign up participants with a goal of getting 100 households into the program.

As with any pilot program, we have had successes and failures. The biggest challenge has been to find a second site that is accessible, easily monitored and located east of the Fox River. Our initial site at the Waste Transfer Station did not work well and had very low use.

Our initial site at the Waste Transfer Station did not work well and had very low use. Our 2nd site location at the former Brown County UW-Extension building worked extremely well until the building was sold.



A site at the Allouez Yard Waste Center proved hard for people to find and also had very low use in the six months it was open.

History of the Program cont.

An additional challenge arose when the Oshkosh biodigester made the decision to no longer accept any type of compostable plastic including compostable bags. On the other hand, our current location at the Recycling Transfer Station has proven to be our biggest success. The site is used by the more than 250 households who now bring food waste to us as we continue to search for a viable east side site.

We have also been able to better schedule when material is picked up with pick-ups every 3-4 weeks in winter and 2-3 weeks in summer. Our goal is to work with our communities or a private entity to develop a local curbside collection program. In the meantime, we will continue to offer a food waste drop-off program to serve the residents of Brown County.

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 the biodigester. Any amount of contamination decreases the value of the final compost product. The challenge for staff at Brown County is finding an effective of communicating with participants about what items are acceptable and unacceptable in the program.

In an effort to help our food waste program 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 cell phone based app from a Wisconsin-based startup will allow residents to search by text through a custom database of Oshkosh digester-defined materials that are acceptable and unacceptable in the drop-off program. Stay tuned for more information. We are hoping to have the app available sometime later this spring or summer just in time to reopen our drop-off program!



Photo Credit: ERbin.com

Possible New East Side Drop-off Site

The Food Waste & Organics program has received feedback from program participants that an east side drop-off site would make material drop-off easier and more accessible. We have heard your voice and a second drop-off site, focused on the east side is in the works!

If you are wondering why it has taken the County so long to establish another site it is because any drop-off site has to fulfill the following criteria:



Photo Credit: ei.columbia.edu

- It must be on a publicly-owned site
- It must be physically easy to access
- Drop-off hours must be flexible to accommodate a wide range of participants
- There needs to be some monitoring to avoid contamination issues

As more details are finalized, Brown County will reach out to participants of the Food Waste Program for their input on the new east side site.

Brown County Port & Resource Recovery

Phone: 920-492-4950

Fax: 920-492-4957

BC_Resource_Recovery@browncountywi.gov

www.browncountyrecycling.org

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