
Navigating compost contamination concerns in Vermont

— Natasha Duarte —
Composting Association of
Vermont

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Composting Association of Vermont

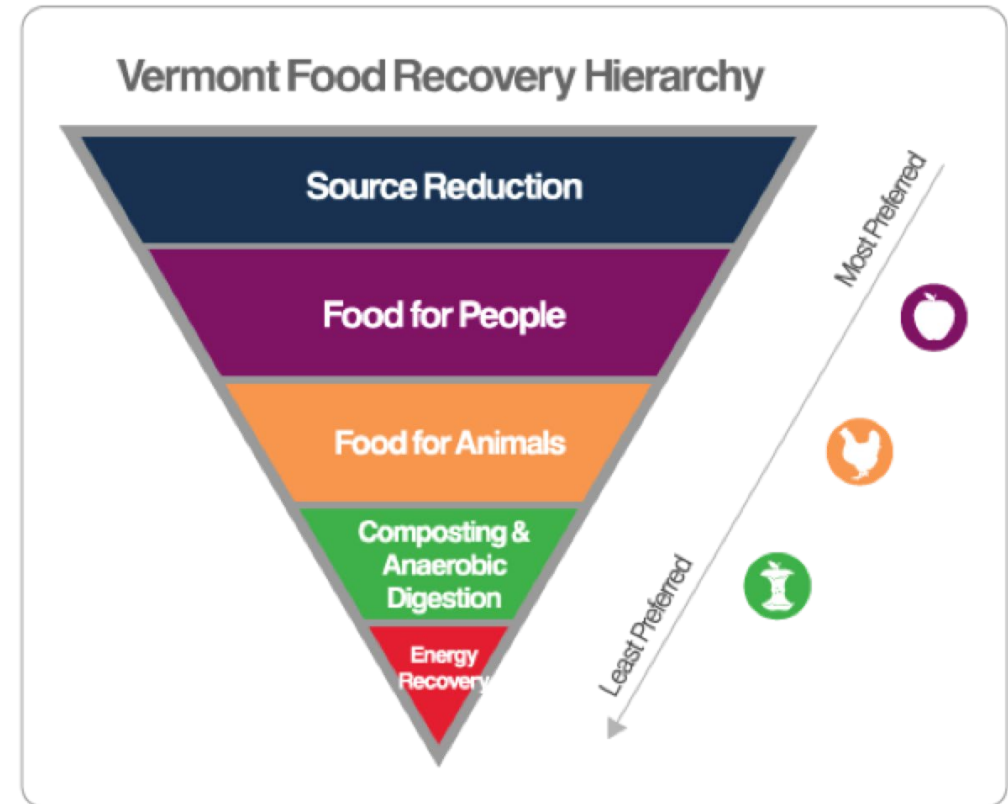
Founded in 2002

Our mission is to promote the production of compost and composting as an integral link between sustainable agriculture, communities, and economies. We promote market development, access to resources, and compost standards to develop an environmentally sustainable compost industry in Vermont.

501c3 - cooperative, stakeholder driven approach in our work

Vermont's Universal Recycling Law (Act 148)

- Passed unanimously in 2012
- Effectively bans:
 - ◆ Blue Bin recyclables (2015)
 - ◆ Leaf and yard debris, clean wood (2016)
 - ◆ Food scraps (2014-2020)
- The goal: Improve capture and diversion rates to prevent valuable materials from being landfilled



Source Separation - It's the Law

Sec. 1. 10 V.S.A. § 6602. DEFINITIONS

- (31) “Food residual” means **source separated and uncontaminated material that is derived from processing or discarding of food and that is recyclable**, in a manner consistent with section 6605k of this title. Food residual may include pre consumer and post-consumer food scraps. “Food residual” does not mean meat and meat-related products when the food residuals are composted by a resident on site.
- (32) “Source separated” or “source separation” means the **separation of compostable and recyclable materials from non-compostable, non-recyclable materials at the point of generation.**

Why Does Source Separation Matter?

- Pathways for contamination
 - ◆ Micro- & nano-plastics
 - ◆ PFAS
 - ◆ Heavy Metals
 - ◆ Other toxins/pollutants
- Soil & resource stewardship
 - ◆ Principle of Return
 - ◆ Precautionary Principle
- Builds a culture of ecological literacy



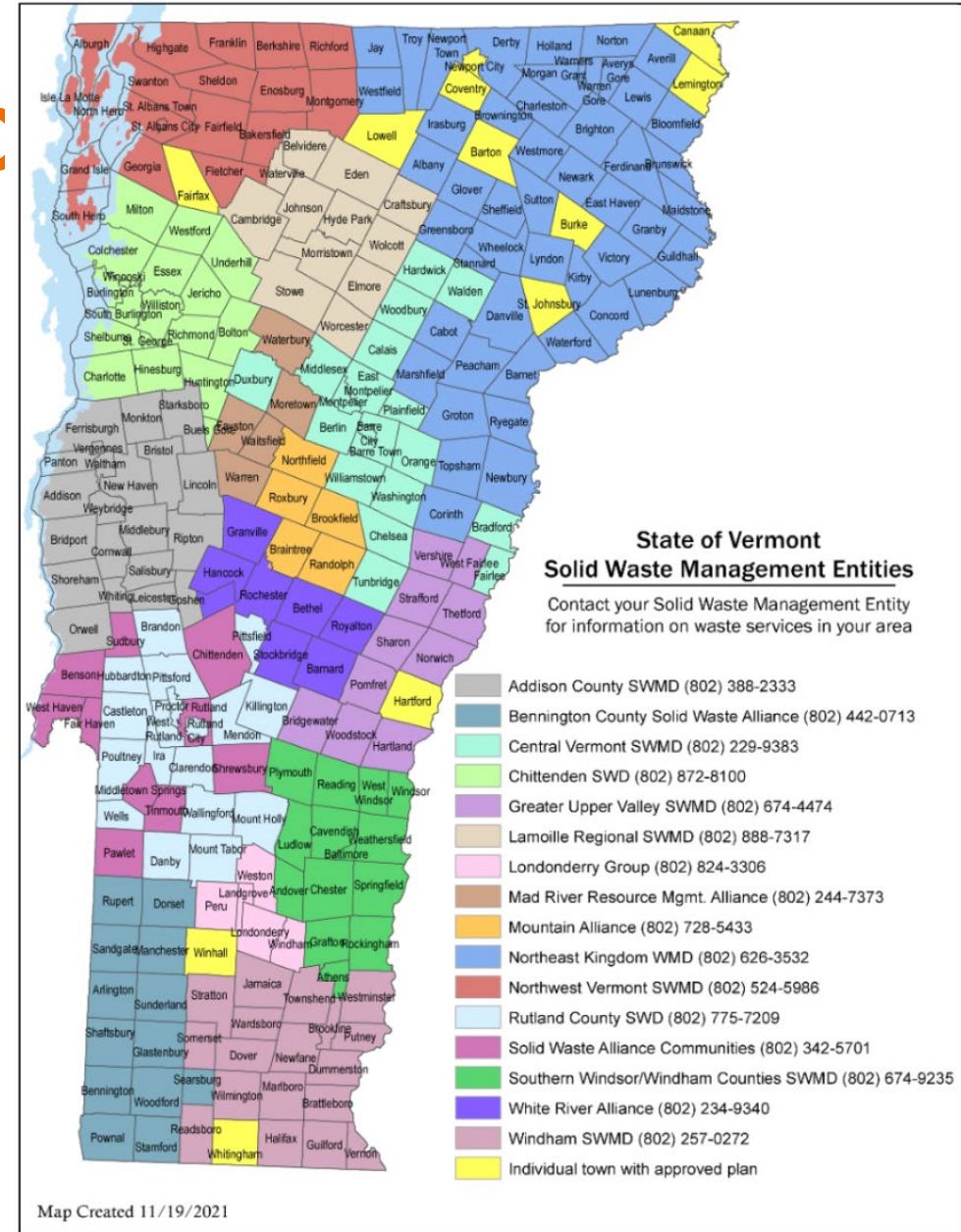
Photo credit: NY Times

Policy... & Implementation of Policy



Challenges in Implementatic

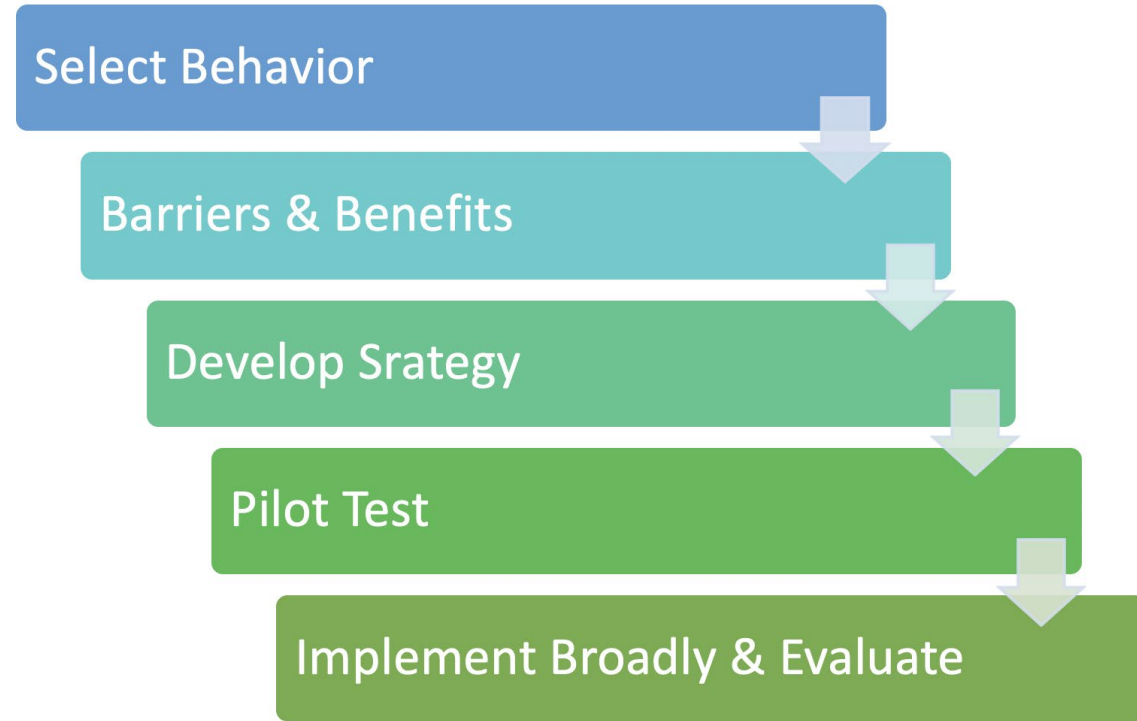
- Diverse settings
- Confusion:
 - ◆ Different rules with different haulers, different compost facilities
 - ◆ Compostable packaging
- Inconsistent messaging
- “SSO isn’t practical”
 - ◆ Social innovation vs. mechanical innovation



Successful Implementation Requires Outreach & I

Vermont Organics Recycling Summit

- [CompostingVermont.org/vors-2022](https://compostingvermont.org/vors-2022)
- Two sessions on SSO
 - ◆ Cultural approaches
 - ◆ Behavioral science
- A session on compostable packaging
- State of the State of Organics



Community-Based Social Marketing, McKenzie-Mohr, D. (1999, 2011)

SSO Requires Behavior Change Among Generators

- It starts with intention to change
 - ◆ Belief that it can be done - solution-based approach
- Behavior change is rarely motivated by information alone
- Relational, collaborative
 - ◆ Composters-Haulers; Haulers-Generators
- Messaging: Explicit, clear, diversely redundant, inviting & fun



Photo credit: Black Dirt Farm

Media Campaign Planning begun for reducing compost/digestate contaminants



**Eat what you buy. Compost the scraps.
Click to learn more.**



Getting it done on the ground

- Set expectations
 - ◆ SSO as explicit base in contracts
 - ◆ Training: redundant messaging in multiple forms; iterative; beyond information transfer
 - ◆ Signage, labeling
- Behavior modeling within existing culture
 - ◆ ID champions with strong social capital
- Effective systems
 - ◆ Easy to use sorting areas
- Load monitoring, picking and documenting
 - ◆ Real-time communication
 - ◆ Social media
 - ◆ Ability to refuse totes, loads

At the compost facility:

- Picking piles, pre-screening
- Post-process removal
- ..Depack? It's a tool, not "THE" solution



Never-packaged organics heading to a depack facility

New Legislation

H.501– an act relating the regulation of depackaging facilities
(modified & folded into **H446** act relating to misc. natural resources & development su

- Moratorium on new depackaging facility certifications in Vermont
- Convene stakeholders to make recommendations
 - ◆ Organics Diversion Hierarchy, Source Separation, Proper use of depackagers
- Study Microplastics & PFAS in food waste
- Adopt rules for depackaging facility operation in Vermont

Opportunities to Reduce Contamination

Food Scrap Generators

- Reduce waste; Reduce opportunities for contamination
- PLU removal
- Improved new hire/new student training
- Internal workplace culture

Haulers

- Develop some commonalities around SSO

Districts/State

- Promote, support & enforce SSO: set an ambitious vision
- More educational/training support
- Product standards
- Be intentional with depack messaging
- See stewardship capacity as social capital – invest in it

Questions?

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