

Case Study: Marketing On-Farm Compost

The Northeast Recycling Council (NERC) is a non-profit organization that conducts research, hands-on projects, training, and outreach on issues associated with source reduction, recycling, composting, environmentally preferable purchasing, and decreasing the toxicity of the solid waste stream.

Integrating composting practices into farming operations and refining compost production and utilization methods can help farmers better manage farm organic waste, including manure and crop residues. The resulting compost can be applied for on-farm soil benefits and/or sold as a valued-added product. To expand and support farm-based compost markets in the Northeast, NERC was awarded a grant from the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. Resources developed by NERC for the project, as well as presentations from seven compost marketing workshops, are posted on NERC's website. NERC provided technical assistance to farm compost operations, including development of operation-specific marketing plans.

Always Something Farm **Croydon, New Hampshire**

Overview

Always Something Farm in Croydon, New Hampshire has been owned by the Quimby family for more than 10 years. The farm is comprised of 280 acres. When the Quimby family purchased the farm, it had been fallow for a number of years. Since then the family has worked to reclaim and put the fields back into the production of horse hay, with more than 2,000 bales produced annually.

Always Something Farm began its compost operation in 2012. With a background in construction and excavation, Gary Quimby expanded the farm business to include the manufacture and sale of a variety of compost and landscaping products, including: compost, garden mix, loam, super loam, and bark mulch. Always Something Farm takes pride in operating a community organics composting facility dedicated to providing high quality compost products and doing its part to preserve the environment. The operation offers an alternative to the local community to compost organic materials into valuable soil amendment products instead of sending them to the landfill.

Mr. Quimby earned a Certificate in Technical Ability in composting from the Maine Compost School and has learned the proper methods for mixing and processing a nutrient rich compost produced on the farm. Mr. Quimby also operates his own construction business consisting of excavation, septic systems (certified by state of New Hampshire and Presby Environmental), and miscellaneous carpentry.



Materials Composted

Always Something Farm accepts manure, yard trimmings, including leaves and grass clippings, and small amounts food scraps. No tipping fee is charged for drop-off of yard trimmings, manure, or vegetative waste. The operation charges a tip fee for drop-off of brush, from \$10 for a pick-up load to \$20 per ton for larger loads. The farm will provide pick-up services for manure and other organics; a tip fee is charged depending on the material collected and distance.

Compost Method and Equipment

To ensure a quality compost product, feedstocks are closely monitored for contaminants as materials are dropped off at the site and prior to mixing. Materials are mixed and formed into windrows (elongated piles) on the compost pad with a front loader. Windrows are managed so that a temperature between 140 and 160 degrees is reached and maintained sufficiently to kill any unwanted pathogens. After the active phase of composting is complete, the compost is cured. The cured compost is screened and ready for sale. Finished compost is tested for quality assurance.

Marketing

Quimby Construction has been a reputable construction business in the Croydon area for a number of years. The Company's expansion into the composting business was a natural way to complement the family's farm operation, presenting an excellent business model and marketing strategy offering a diversity of services and products to create a strong business portfolio. Promoting both services and products allows for an opportunity to increase the number and diversity of customers, expanding beyond construction to include landscape, agricultural customers, and others.

Always Something Farm is in a strategic location for marketing its compost, with the sales yard having frontage on a main road (Route 10) within close proximity to cities and towns throughout central New Hampshire and Vermont.

To enhance its marketing capacity, Always Something Farm:

- Attended Maine Compost School
- Attended a NERC Compost Marketing Workshop
- Completed a compost marketing plan
- Developed a professional appearing website in 2011
- Extensive use of the website for marketing both products and services, with good description of products and pricing, along with related services
- Sales yard frontage with visible signage
- Using business contacts from associates with Quimby Construction to increase business connections and promote the operation's products through effective use of "word-of-mouth."
- Placement of ads in the local Shopper newspaper
- Ad on placemats in a local restaurant
- Article in the Upper Valley Home Improvement Guide (Croydon, New Hampshire) for Fall 2012



In the summer of 2013, Always Something Farm began sending out letters to surrounding towns about working with them to take their resident and municipally generated yard trimmings, and potentially food scraps in the future. The operation is also planning to conduct outreach to commercial food generators and local haulers for composting.

Compost Utilization, Customer Base, and Sales

Always Something Farm offers a wide diversity of services, including manure pick-up, excavation, lot cleanup, hay sales, and more. These services add strength to its product sales. The good reputation of Quimby Construction and its extensive contacts in the region supports its compost farm enterprise. Combining construction services with the manufacture of compost and related products allows for an effective crossover business model.

The operation offers two compost products: a “pure” compost product, marketed as a soil amendment for garden or lawn and, a compost/loam mix (a “Garden Mix” or “Super Loam”) for raised gardens and lawn repairs or new lawns.



The operation also sells three kinds of bark mulch: a dark blend (a fine textured pine and spruce blend); a red blend (pine and spruce blend color enhanced to look like hemlock at a cost savings); and a light blend (a mix of fir, spruce, and pine that produces a natural light brown bark).

All products are sold in bulk. Compost sells for \$35/yard and \$40/yard, if delivered. The Garden Mix/Super Loam (a mix of compost and loam) sells for \$30/yard and \$35/yard, if delivered.

The operation offers a wide range of services, including large bulk product sales, onsite loading, and delivery. Collection services for manure pick-up are also provided. Additional services include: bark mulch installation; lawn installation; lot clearing; tree work; excavation and site work; drainage and septic work; and carpentry. The operation also sells firewood, horse and mulch hay, as well as stone and concrete.



In 2012, sales of the Always Something Farm Garden Mix/Super Loam increased to 500 yards (from 60 yards in 2011) and sales of compost were similar. In three years business has tripled in size.



Challenges and Solutions

Challenge: Compost sales competition from two nearby farm compost operations and several operations in Vermont that sell bulk and bagged compost.

Solution: Prime sales yard location and diversity of products and services makes Always Something Farm well positioned for strong growth opportunity.

Challenge: There is little incentive for organics (yard trimmings or food scrap) generators to compost in New Hampshire.

Solution: Obtained permit by notification for accepting food waste and making contacts and developing outreach for targeting municipalities for composting of leaves and yard trimmings, as well as supermarkets and other food scrap generators.

Challenge: Gaining cooperation from haulers to collect food scraps.

Solution: Increasing visibility of convenient drop-off location for disposal of food scraps for composting.

Future Plans

Always Something Farm has proven to be successful in using its existing business experience and operation, Quimby Construction, to leverage its on-farm composting resources and expertise to develop a diversified operation offering a wide-range of services and products.

Future plans include:

- A mid-term goal is to increase compost production and sales at least 25%, from 500 yards per year to 3,000 - 5,000 yards per year
- Expand revenues from tip fees through expanded collaboration with municipalities and landscapers
- Explore expansion of feedstock and compost recipe development to include food scraps from supermarkets, food production operations, etc. with the goal of increasing inputs and allowing for additional tip fee opportunity and increased revenue

For more information

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