

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.

Mayval Farm

Westhampton, Massachusetts

Overview

Located just outside of Northampton in western Massachusetts, [Mayval Farm](#) has been run by the Parsons family since 1778. Today, the farm is operated by brothers Henry III and Edward Parsons, along with other family members. Henry manages the dairy herd while Ed oversees the crops, maple sugaring, and equipment. All of the hay and corn silage fed to the cows is grown on land around the farm.

With about 100 registered Holstein, Jersey, and Brown Swiss dairy cows, the farm is one of only 150 dairy farms remaining in Massachusetts. In the springtime, the farm proudly continues the decades-old tradition of making maple syrup and maple cream from the trees around the farm. Maple products are available online and at the front door of the farmhouse. In addition to selling dairy products, Mayval farm also sells free-range eggs, as well as compost, and all-natural beef on a seasonal basis.

Mayval Farm began composting in 2002. The operation was designed to meet on-farm manure management needs of Mayval Farm and to produce a marketable product. Horse stall bedding is delivered to the farm for initial use in farm stalls. This material, along with sand/manure from the stalls, is scraped and removed for composting.





Mayval Farm has a business goal of diversifying its farm operations. The farm recently began to undertake an expansion of its dairy products sales with a newly built creamery to produce additional farmstead dairy products—cheese, yogurt and creamline milk. The farm diversification goals also include increasing the production and marketability of its compost.

Materials Composted

Horse bedding is delivered to the farm by horse operation owners in the area. This material is initially placed in the farm’s free stall barn alleys to soak up urine and manure. This material, along with sand (also used to soak up urine and manure) from the dairy stalls, is scraped and run through a spreader to create a uniform mixture for composting. In addition, local landscapers deliver leaves which are added to the compost mix in the fall.

Compost Method and Equipment

Sand, bedding, and manure are removed from the barn via a mechanical scraper and conveyed out of the barn into a manure spreader. The manure spreader is hauled using a tractor to the compost site. The material is dumped and a front loader is used to form the collected materials into windrows (elongated piles). Leaves are also added to the mixture. Windrows are monitored and turned as needed using the front loader.



Some finished compost is loaded by hand into feed bags for product sale. Bulk purchases of finished compost are loaded using the front loader.

Marketing

Mayval Farm’s loyal base of maple and dairy customers are a valuable asset for the farm’s diversification efforts and a primary target for word-of-mouth compost sales. The farm has an excellent website used to promote farm products, as well as a regularly updated Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Additional marketing capacity building and strategies:

- Attended a NERC Composting and Compost Marketing Workshop, December 2011
- Development of a compost marketing plan
- Mayval Farm [website](#) started in 2011
- Joined [Facebook](#) in 2011
- Has an active [Twitter feed](#)
- Listed on the CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture) [Farm Directory](#)



Compost Utilization, Customer Base, and Sales

Finished compost is used on the Mayval farm fields to increase field fertility. Compost product is also sold in 40 pound bags for \$6 per bag and by bulk for \$35 per cubic yard. Product is sold only through direct farm sales.



Mayval Farm's successful dairy operation and farm expertise has allowed it to develop a good reputation and strong customer base. The compost operation allows for increasing the farm's diversification and product offerings to its core customers, as well as bringing in new customers.

In 2011, the farm sold approximately 30 cubic yards, at about \$35 per cubic yard bulk or \$6 per bag. The farm grossed approximately \$900 through compost product sales.

Challenges and Solutions

Challenge: Needs more feedstock in order to increase compost product development.

Solution: The farm has an excellent relationship with area horse operations and a good on-farm source of materials for composting. There are a number of additional horse stable and dairy operations in the area for potential feedstock. Also, there is a potential for collecting food scraps.

Challenge: Two farm operations close to Mayval Farm offer similar compost products.

Solution: Creating a niche market and product/service that can set itself apart from the competition. Mayval Farm's loyal base of maple and dairy customers are a valuable asset; working to market material to these customers has proven beneficial.

Challenge: Demands of the dairy operation and diversifying into increased dairy product production leaves little time for focusing on compost product development.

Solution: Continue to manufacture compost as a manure management strategy, focusing on on-farm use and sales to farm customers.

Future Plans

Mayval Farm has a business goal of diversifying their farm operations in order to continue to be sustainable and enhance profitability, including increasing the production and marketability of their compost.

Future goals include:

- Continue to develop and improve compost product quality and consistency
- Increase production of a consistent compost product sufficiently to increase marketability and sales
- Explore bagging options as a way to package and present their compost product
- Increase use of low cost, social media and the Mayval Farm website to promote its compost product

For More Information

The Parsons

Mayval Farm

www.mayvalfarm.com

