

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.

Tripp's Dairy Farm

Westport, Massachusetts

Overview

[Tripp's Dairy Farm](#) is a family farm started in 1945 by the late Howard Tripp. The farm has been at its present location in Westport, Massachusetts since 1958. The primary mission of the business is to raise high-grade dairy replacement and beef cows, along with developing and marketing a high quality natural compost to help increase farm profitability and as a manure management option.

Tripp's Dairy Farm compost is a mix of leaves, cow manure, cranberry waste, shellfish, and other organics. The compost is screened and mixed with soil and other ingredients to make a premium soil blend product. Tripp's Dairy Farm compost product is sold retail on the farm, along with aged cow manure.

The compost operation is managed by Jay Tripp, farm owner and operator, along with one other full-time farm operator.

Materials Composted

Tripp's Dairy Farm compost is a mix of leaves, cranberry waste, and shellfish. The farm also receives occasional deliveries of crab shells to incorporate into the compost mix. Some pre-consumer fruits/vegetables and bakery waste is also accepted from a local manufacturer. Cow manure and bedding from the farm dairy operation is included in the mix.





Compost Method and Equipment

The Town of Dartmouth delivers leaves to the operation. Residents and landscapers can drop-off leaves and grass at the site. Cranberry waste is delivered by haulers and mixed with leaves upon delivery. Leaves that landscapers deliver are used to bed the farm's freestall cows in the winter. Younger calves are bedded with shredded paper delivered from a plumber's supply company. This bedding and manure is mixed in with the other compost feedstocks.

Collection services for pre-consumer fruits/vegetables and bakery waste are offered by the farm operator and included in the compost mix.

The mixed material is formed into large windrows (elongated piles) using a front loader. Windrows are monitored and turned regularly with a front loader to promote the composting process. The compost is cured and screened for final product. The farm uses a rented screener.

Marketing

Much of the farm's compost marketing promotion is done through word-of-mouth, knocking on doors, and "chasing" leads. Tripp's Dairy Farm also has an extensive [website](#) for advertising its compost products. The website lists the compost products, ingredients, and includes pictures of the compost operation. Information on compost uses is also included.

To promote its brand name and support the local community, Tripp's Dairy Farm also has a presence at the Westport Fair and sponsors a local baseball team.

In order to develop its marketing capacity, Tripp's Dairy Farm:

- Designed a compost operation that meets its on-farm manure management needs and to help bring in additional revenues through compost product sales
- Attended a Massachusetts compost operators training
- Attended a NERC compost marketing workshop
- Developed a compost marketing plan

Compost Utilization, Customer Base, and Sales

Tripp's Dairy Farm sells a screened compost soil blend product. Product is sold primarily in bulk to retail customers. The farm operators will load material for onsite purchase or deliver product. Some material is sold in bags. The farm also sells aged cow manure.

The customer base includes gardeners, home owners, agricultural producers, landscapers, and construction projects. Sales for large development projects have improved in the past year; primarily for road building. A significant portion of sales also goes to haulers and landscapers who backhaul material once their organics loads are dumped at the farm.

Compost products currently sell for \$15 per cubic yard.





Challenges and Solutions

Challenges: Tip fees are not currently charged as generators refuse to pay for disposal.

Solution: Off-site feedstock materials for mixing with farm-generated manure are essential for the dairy operation's manure management needs. Product sales are used as the revenue generation source for the compost operation. Mr. Tripp also works with feedstock generators to purchase compost.

Challenge: Additional carbon sources are needed to better balance nitrogen sources in the compost recipe mix.

Solution: The farm conducts ongoing outreach to landscapers and residents for delivery of leaves.

Future Plans

There is opportunity for expansion of Tripp's Compost products into soil manufacturing, agriculture, landscaping, and construction projects. More outreach and promotion to landscapers and agricultural operations is planned. The pending Massachusetts proposal to ban disposal of food waste by large generators will potentially allow for opportunities for gaining revenues by accepting additional food scraps for tipping fees and increasing compost production.

Additional goals:

- Sell more product at a minimum of \$20 per cubic yard
- Explore through marketing analysis what people are willing to pay for compost product
- Explore options for additional feedstocks to expand the operation, improve recipe development, and increase compost production

For More Information

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