"Target Zero-Waste" policy is not only practical, but helps reduce, reuse and recycle

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Diverting waste from landfills, as an environmental policy, is not only practical...it's a practice that emphasizes the first and most efficient of the three "R's" ...Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

Diverting organic waste from landfills as a first step in implementing "Target Zero-Waste" initiatives makes good sense, given that up to a whopping 95% of organic landfill matter can be composted.

With companies being vigilant about evaluating their energy spend and reducing their energy costs, coupled with fuel surcharges becoming the new "norm"-waste management practices are more frequently being conceptualized and executed locally, borrowing from the "foodie" world concept of "locavores." As an example, the 100-Mile Diet is an eating plan in which consumers try to eat only or mostly, food grown within 100 miles of their homes (a challenge when one lives in Minnesota!).

The locavore trend seques seamlessly into a discussion about the recently revived, age-old practice of composting, an efficient waste reduction practice best implemented locally. Corporate leaders like Hearst Corp., and entrepreneurial companies like TerraCycle are on the leading edge of harnessing the benefits of composting on a commercial basis.

A simple, low-tech field, composting is comprised of primarily two methods: a) thermophillic (heat pile) and b) vermicomposting (use of earthworms). Opinions vary as to which process is more efficient overall, however, vermicomposting is widely acknowledged for more efficiently producing a more nourishing "earth cocktail" from the same organic waste as compared to heat pile composting.

According to TerraCycle, "There are big benefits in using worms for composting, especially greater speed." The EPA reports similar findings in its article (EPA530-N-05-001). Tribal Composting Nourishes Land and Tradition which states: "The worms consume more than their body weight everyday, and you don't have to turn the waste."

Impetus for commercialization of the composting process flows from overall increased environmental awareness, and governmental mandates. In our town, Mayor Bloomberg's plaNYC 2030 addresses this initiative under the heading of "Climate Change: reduce global warming emissions by more than 30%."1

In Europe, and particularly in the UK, "Government predictions are that a three or four fold increase in the size of the composting industry will be needed to cope with the implementation of the European Landfill Directive and is likely to promote the development of a wide range of composting processes and technologies. The key to achieving the European targets will be increased diversity. Vermicomposting operations, which employ many millions of earthworms as the main waste-processing agent, can have advantages over traditional composting methods. Vermicomposting has been adopted worldwide, often with great success where conditions are suitable and could undoubtedly play a significant role in the developing composting industry."

The Green Machine, in use at the Boothferry Golf Club, in Spaldington, UK, harnesses the use of both worms and compost heaps. Realizing that each system has a value in its own right, both are put together to create an all encompassing low cost, tidy compost method for the small commercial user enabling them to transform their organic waste into a valuable asset with minimum outlay, rather than a waste stream problem. Worms are invaluable in dealing with liquid and less solid waste arising from catering establishments that are hard to deal with by other methods. Heaping creates a quick breakdown of organic material making it readily available for use on the land. The system equipment consists of a modular WormPod filled with 4k of worms per square metre giving 10 sq metres of wormbed capable of up to 30k+ of processing per day.2

Although the composting method is not identified, the Hearst Corporation formally introduced it as part of Hearst Tower's green philosophy. "Our introduction of this aggressive composting and recycling plan is just another way Hearst is demonstrating its commitment to being green," said Brian Schwagerl, vice president, real estate and facilities planning, Hearst Corp. "We are delighted to be one of the first buildings of this size to take on such an important initiative." Composting yields a number of environmental benefits including enriching soil and preventing pollution. It also reduces the amount of green waste going into landfills. During Hearst's pilot, the amount of waste sent to landfills dropped by 23 tons. Organic materials decaying in landfills are responsible for emitting methane gas, one of the greenhouse gases tied to global warming.3

As a question, given that tax abatement legislation has been recently passed supporting the implementation of green roofs, what is the possibility that the initiative is met with the proliferation of green roof gardens comprised of native plants species which foster biodiversity, which in turn are fed by composting organic building waste right at the source on each and every commercial building rooftop? Now that's local and zero waste!

Footnotes:

1. www.nyc.gov/html/planyc2030/html/home/home.shtml
2. The Worm Research Center; www.wormresearchcentre.co.uk/initiative.htm
3. Hearst Tower Among First Buildings to Adopt "Target Zero-Waste" Policy; www.wmur.com/greenpages/15900949/detail.html.

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