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Local businesses recycle food scraps

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By Lisa McCormack

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It turns out your mother was right: It's bad to waste food.

Local businesses are reducing their waste and their carbon footprints by turning food scraps into compost.

Stowe Mountain Resort and Green Mountain Coffee Roasters are among 49 restaurants, cafeterias and grocery stores whose food scraps are being collected by the Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District and hauled to a regional composting facility.

The trash district estimates 2,605 tons of food has been diverted from landfills since the program began in 2004.

If all of Vermont's food scraps were composted instead of being buried in landfills, the carbon offset would be equivalent to not burning 12 million gallons of gasoline. Carbon-dioxide emissions have been linked to global climate change.

Local businesses that recently joined the program include RJ's Friendly Market in Waterbury and the Northfield Grand Union supermarket. Topnotch Resort and the Innsbruck Inn in Stowe, along with La Strada Bakery and the Alchemist in Waterbury, are signing up.

The trash district plans to expand the program soon to the Mad River Valley.

Stowe Mountain Resort has been composting its food scraps since last year, at the suggestion of its composting awareness committee. Just last month, it joined the trash district's program.

The food scraps come from its luxury hotel, Stowe Mountain Lodge, and from Spruce Camp, its base lodge at Spruce Peak.

Its food-scrap recycling efforts recently won the 2009 National Ski Association Golden Eagle Award for recycling and waste management.

"It's a huge component of our environmental initiative," said resort spokesman Jeff Wise.

Most businesses say they joined the program because they wanted to reduce their waste, and the program makes that easy by offering pickup service.

"We were looking for an alternative to throwing our food scraps in the garbage," said Robert George, owner of RJ's Friendly Market. "The price was right and they've made it very convenient for us to step right into this program."

Here's how the program works: Once a week, a Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District truck travels to Waterbury and Stowe, picks up 48-gallon totes full of food scraps from participating businesses, cleans the totes and delivers the scraps to GROW Compost, a new facility in Moretown.

"We are so delighted to be fully operational and to see the truck roll in with food scraps that we can recycle back into soil," said GROW Compost owner Lisa Ranson. "We can't wait until this fall, when we will have cured compost ready to sell."

Green Mountain Coffee Roasters recently joined the program. It had already been composting burlap and coffee chaff from its production waste for years through a program at the Intervale

Center in Burlington.

"Now, we're splitting it between the Intervale and GROW Compost," said Matt DeLuca, a member of the company's corporate responsibility team, which oversees environmental initiatives. "With the new program, we're looking to compost food waste — everything from used coffee grounds to fruit and vegetable scraps in our employee lunchrooms. We'd also like to compost some of our compostable packages."

Much of the company's food waste comes from its visitor center and factory outlet, both in Waterbury village. The program gives the baristas who serve up hundreds of cups of coffee each day a convenient way to dispose of used coffee grounds, and other food waste.

"The really neat thing about this program is the variety of things they can accept," DeLuca said. "Composting some things, like dairy and meat, can be hard. This program is open to these types of things, which is exciting."

The program is a "fantastic opportunity" for the company to think of its waste in a different way, DeLuca said.

"It's great when you have a program where they've taken care of the administration, from keeping everything clean to the employee training they provide for us," DeLuca said.

The Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District has made a commitment to help its 22 member communities work toward "zero waste." The district strives to capture all recyclable waste from household and business trash, and finding ways to reuse and recycle it, instead burying it in a landfill or burning it in an incinerator.

*Information on food scrap composting: Josh Kelly, 802-472-5138, extension 204;
josh@highfieldsinstitute.org.*

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