

School Composting Options



The following table is intended to provide you with the big picture considerations associated with operating different kinds of composting systems at your school. The four types of composting systems compared here are:

1. On--Site Bin System
2. On--Site Forced Air System (similar to a bin system but with included equipment (blowers and air channels) that are designed to aerate the compost piles, ultimately speeding up the process of decomposition)
3. Hauling Off--Site to Chicken Feeding
4. Hauling Off--Site to a Local Composter

The tables below walk one through the **requirements** and **functions** (or outputs) of the different systems profiled. Off-site options are often the most sustainable option long--term and can be implemented much faster than on-site composting. On-site composting requires a lot of hard work and long-term institutional commitment.

Two other options include:

1. In-Vessel Systems – We did not include this option at this time as very few schools we've worked with seriously look at the upfront cost of these, which start at \$10,000 for the smallest systems.
2. Worm Bins for Classrooms -- worm bins are a great method for recycling smaller amounts of food scraps. Worm bins are ideal for classrooms to maintain and use for recycling snack time food scraps.

System Requirements:

Considerations	On-site Bin System	On-site Forced Air System	Hauling Off-site as chicken feed	Hauling off-site to Local Composter
Materials/ Expenses	\$3000--5,000 for roofed structure, and insulated/vector deterrent bins.	\$3,300--5,500 for roofed structure, and insulated/vector deterrent bins, blower and air channels.	\$0	Cost will vary by region and by size of school.
Up-front Labor	80+ Hours	80+ Hours	0 Hours	0 Hours
Operational Labor	6--14 hrs/month (Depending on equipment availability and ease of attaining other feedstocks (such as manures and sawdust).	5 --10 hrs/month (Depending on equipment availability and ease of attaining other feedstocks (such as manures and sawdust).	0--3 hrs (Requires coordination between school and farm).	0
Training	2--4 hrs Training in Recipe and Management	2--4 hrs Training in Recipe and Management	\$0--\$300 (Optional Technical Services for the Chicken Farm).	0

System Function:

Considerations	On-site Bin System	On-site Forced Air System	Hauling Off-site as chicken feed	Hauling off-site to Local Composter
Benefits	On-site system provides prime experiential education opportunity. A typical system might produce 4-8 yards or more of finished compost annually.	On-site system provides prime experiential education opportunity; may produce 4-8 yards of finished compost annually. Forced air reduces labor on pile management and increases the speed of decomposition.	Provide free chicken feed to local farmer. Local farmer may be compelled to provide eggs to the school.	Support of a local composting operation. Opportunities for students to visit the compost facility, utilize as an offsite, outdoor classroom.
Drawbacks	System depends upon the sustained commitment of the school community. System requires a fair amount of labor both up-front and operationally. System requires sourcing carbon and manure inputs from off-site.	System depends upon the sustained commitment of the school community. System requires a fair amount of labor both up-front and operationally. System requires sourcing carbon and manure inputs from off-site. System requires electricity.	No compost made on site.	No compost made on site.
Cost Avoidance	Potential to negotiate trash contract with hauler based on weight reduction (esp. when paired with expanded recycling programs). Production of compost for use on school gardens.	Potential to negotiate trash contract with hauler based on weight reduction (esp. when paired with expanded recycling programs). Production of compost for use on school gardens.	Potential to negotiate trash contract with hauler based on weight reduction (esp. when paired with expanded recycling programs). Farmer may provide eggs to school.	Potential to negotiate trash contract with hauler based on weight reduction (esp. when paired with expanded recycling programs). Composter may provide a deal on compost to the school.

This resource uses or is adapted from content originally developed by the Highfields Center for Composting in Hardwick VT. The Highfields Center for Composting dissolved as an organization in December 2014 and ended its active involvement in the Close the Loop Program.

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The Vermont community wishes to thank the Highfields Center for Composting for its years of outstanding leadership in the service of community composting and universal recycling in Vermont.

