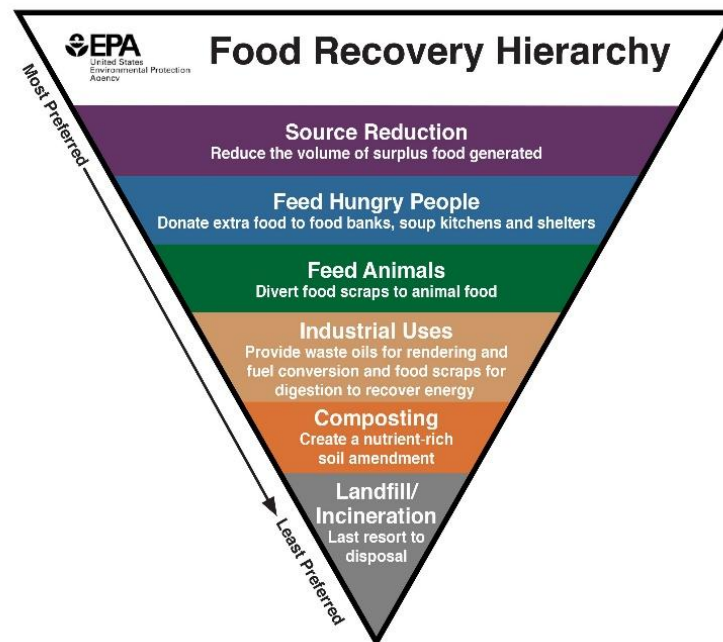


Organic Waste Management in New Jersey: Reducing Food Waste and Improving Food Equity

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Organic Waste Management background

The Organic Waste Management Research Team has spent the past three months researching various state policies for reducing organic waste to determine how New Jersey can improve its current practices to meet its goals for reducing both hunger and methane emissions. When organic waste, like food, enters a landfill, it releases methane which is a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change (read Anna Heckler's [post](#) [1] for additional information). There are many ways to keep organic materials out of landfills including: reducing waste at the source, diverting edible food to people in need, and recycling organics into high-value byproducts like compost and energy.



While the general concepts for reducing food waste are simple, the logistics of promoting this behavior on a large scale across various sectors are challenging. National and state-level food waste policies play a pivotal role in bridging gaps in the circular network of organic waste. For example, how can the state incentivize businesses to donate excess food to food banks, invest in food storage and rescue infrastructure to minimize spoilage, and encourage waste reduction and feeding hungry students in school systems? Our work researching other states' practices will help guide the discussion on improving sustainability and equity in New Jersey's food and waste systems.

Current NJ Policies

New Jersey has not historically prioritized organic waste management, focusing instead on non-organic material recycling and remediating superfund sites (read Abigail Brown's [post](#) [2] for details). More attention is now being directed towards organic waste management and New Jersey has recently passed several pieces of legislation to both reduce organic waste and improve anti-hunger programs.

In October 2021, New Jersey joined a handful of other states in enacting an Organic Waste Ban that prohibits large waste generators (businesses that produce over 52 tons of waste/year) from sending organic waste to landfills if they are located within 25 miles of an approved organic waste processing facility. The NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) has the authority to enforce this law [3].

New Jersey also passed legislation in September 2021 to help address food insecurity issues which, while not directly tied to organic waste, can be implemented to reduce both hunger and food waste. The legislative package aims to increase food security through expanding SNAP benefits and increasing funding for school food programs. An Office of Food Insecurity Advocate within the Department of the Treasury will be established which will improve coordination of state anti-hunger initiatives [4].

These new policies, along with emphasis placed on reducing food waste in the NJDEP's 80x50 Global Warming Response Act report [5], will help move the needle regarding organic waste reduction and food insecurity efforts in the state.

Connecting Food Waste & Food Equity

The following are examples of state programs and policies that illustrate how food waste and food equity issues can be addressed simultaneously.

California: Sutter Health Hospitals in California were part of a pilot program to reduce food waste and feed people in need. Hospital food service workers used Copia food waste tracking software, and an app alerted drivers to recover excess food and deliver it to community nonprofits. This was funded in part by CalRecycle and California Climate Investments [6].

Massachusetts: Massachusetts has a Food Security and Infrastructure Grant Program that funds projects which aim to increase food system resiliency through preventing food waste and improving food rescue. Grants have been awarded for increasing cold storage and transportation for farmers and food rescue organizations, technology upgrades for nonprofits, and processing facilities to increase shelf life of perishable products [7].

Texas: The Texas Student Fairness in Feeding Act of 2017 permits schools to share leftover food with classmates. Students can place unwanted food on "share-carts" which other students can eat during mealtime, and the law also allows schools to store excess and donated food in on-site food pantries [8].

Next Steps

The Organic Waste Research Team is currently finalizing their report with insights gained from researching policies across the nation. This report will be shared with the NJ Climate Change Alliance's Organics Workgroup and released early next year on the State Policy Lab website.

Resources

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