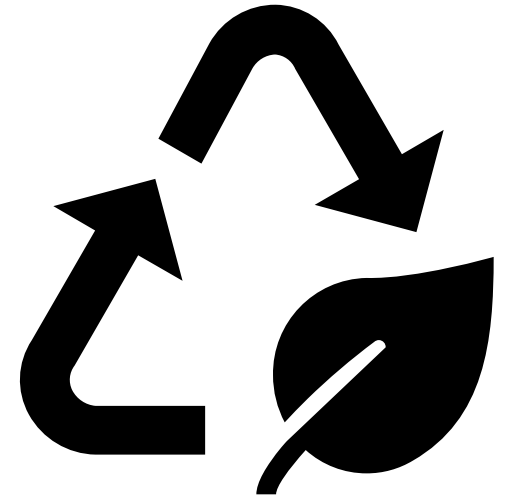


# Wisconsin DNR Organics Management Updates

Wisconsin Council on Recycling  
December 5, 2025



Erik Flesch,  
Organics Waste Management Specialist  
Waste and Materials Management Program



# Agenda

Introduction: New staff member Erik Flesch (Ruth O'Donnell retired in August)

Wisconsin's SWIFR grant work

Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation

Food service sector technical assistance project

Organics-related policy development

Enhanced outreach efforts

Collaborations

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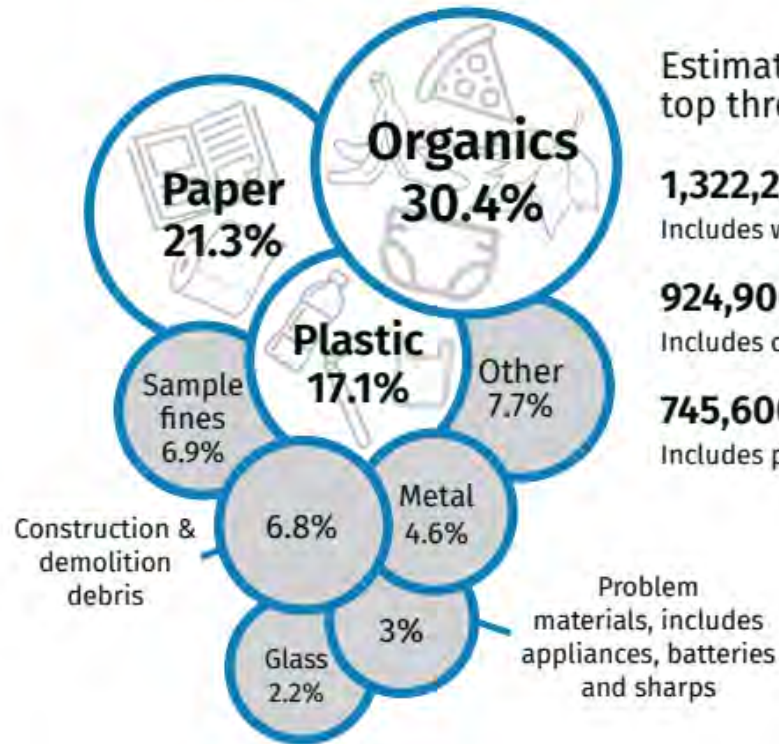
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"WILD WISCONSIN:  
OFF THE RECORD"

# 2020-2021 Waste Characterization Findings

## Statewide waste categories



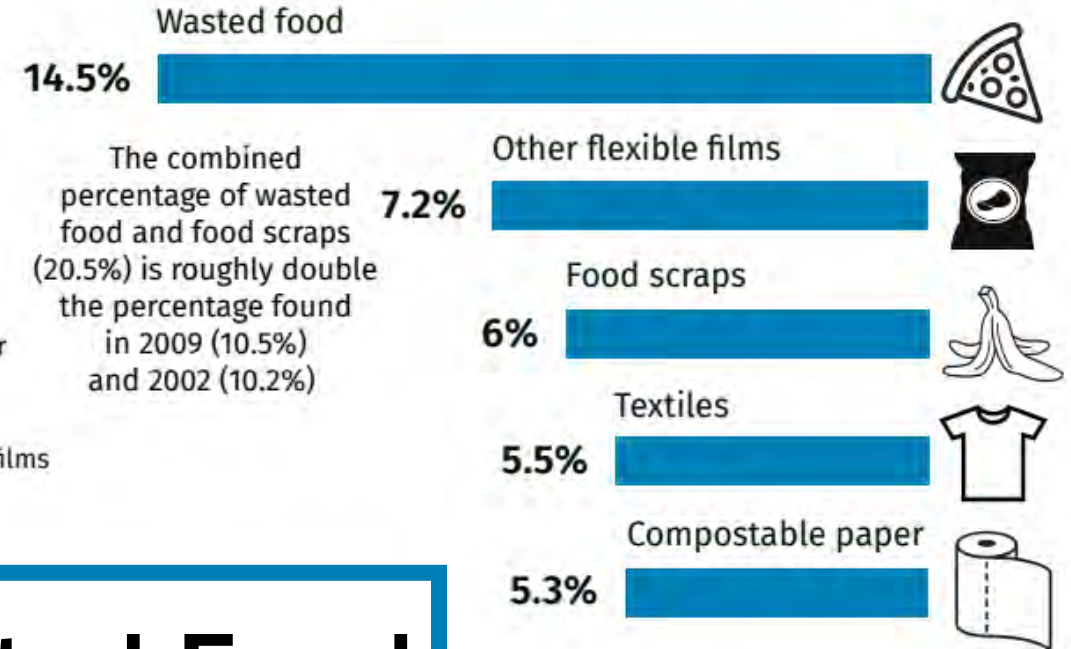
### Estimated 2020 tonnage of top three categories

**1,322,200 tons** of organics  
Includes wasted food, food scraps and yard waste

**924,900 tons** of paper  
Includes cardboard, compostable paper and office paper

**745,600 tons** of plastic  
Includes plastic bottles, plastic wrap and other flexible films

## Top five waste components statewide



The combined percentage of wasted food and food scraps (20.5%) is roughly double the percentage found in 2009 (10.5%) and 2002 (10.2%)

**20% Wasted Food and Food Scraps**

# EPA Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) States and Territories Grant

- SWIFR funds are supporting a Wisconsin DNR multi-year food-waste reduction initiative
- Objective: to halve (reduce by half) per-capita food waste disposed of in Wisconsin landfills by the year 2030 (from 2020 levels).
- This initiative relates to:
  - Wisconsin's "Blueprint for DNR Climate Action 2021-2025"
  - National Food Loss and Waste Reduction Goal
  - Similar United Nations Sustainability Development Goal
- Performance period: October 2023 through September 2026
  - One year remaining
    - Recently completed semi-annual reporting period: April 2025 to Sept. 2025
- **\*Just announced: Round 2 funding has been granted!\***
- **EPA grant coordinator requests Council on Recycling feedback.**



# EPA Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) States and Territories Grant

## Activities

- Contract to conduct food waste prevention and reduction study and develop a statewide food waste management plan.
- Contract with a non-regulatory entity to provide statewide technical assistance and services to local governments, businesses, institutions, and farms on projects that prevent or divert food waste.
- Support DNR staff position(s) to focus on regulatory assistance, development of guidance and outreach, collaborations with other agencies, organizations, and communities

## Measurable Objectives & Outcomes

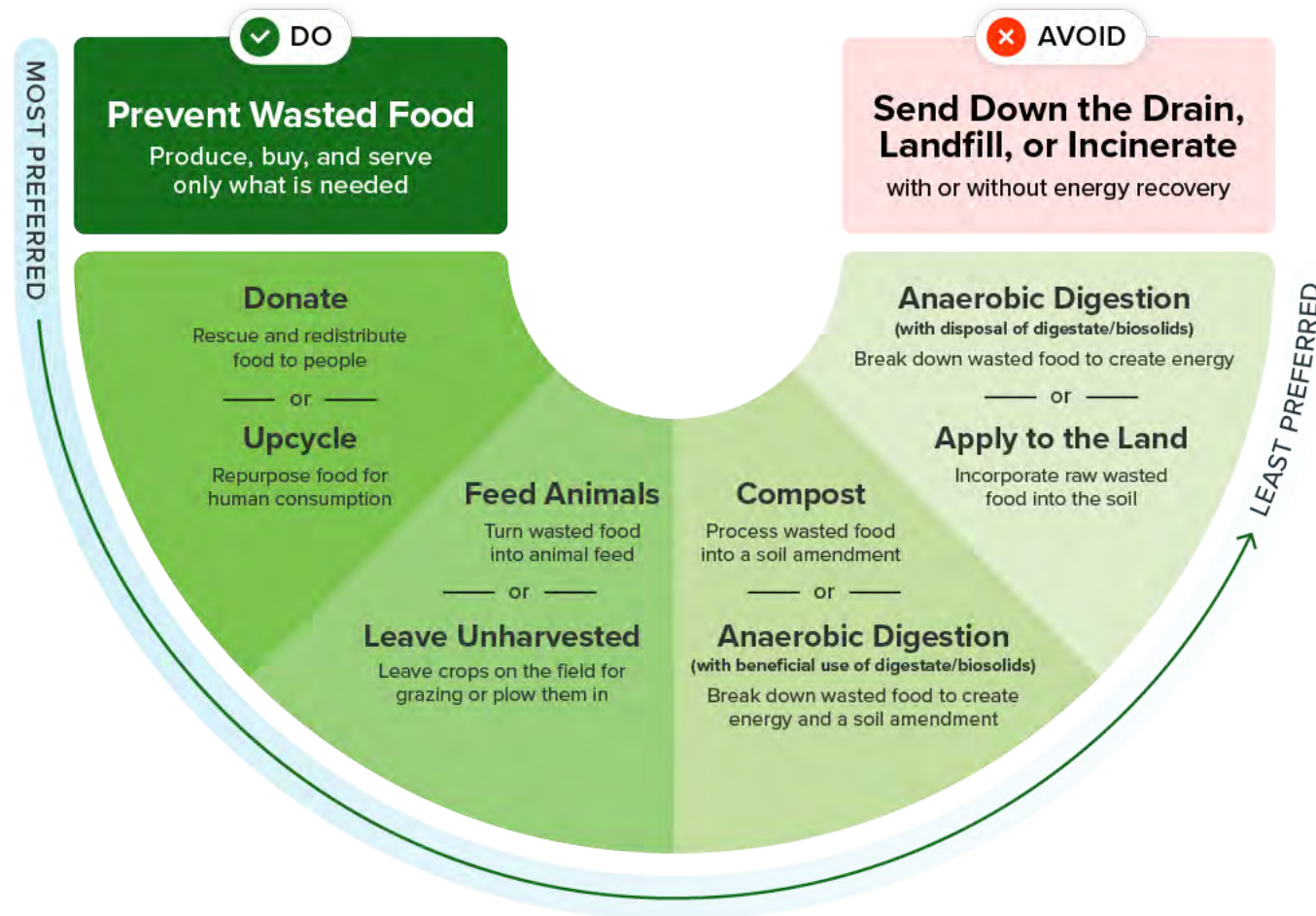
- **Education:** Establish networks for information exchange. Increase awareness of food waste impacts on Wisconsin people and businesses and ways to mitigate those impacts.
- **Behavior change:** Divert organic material to beneficial uses in the state of Wisconsin.
- **Reduced greenhouse gas emissions:** Increase tons of food waste collected, recycled, composted, or otherwise managed via non-landfill management pathways.
- **Increased capacity:** Build infrastructure options and capability for food waste management.

## Intended Beneficiaries

- Wisconsin state and local governments to inform policy, as well as institutions, farms, and other businesses



# EPA Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) States and Territories Grant



# Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation Study

Contractor HDR final report is expected by end of year.

1. Documents the **amounts, types, sources, and destinations** of food waste statewide.
2. Identifies the **capacity** of existing food recovery and recycling infrastructure to divert food waste from landfills.
3. Assesses Wisconsin's **potential capacity**. Identifies barriers between existing and potential capacity.
4. Assesses and ranks the **impact** of waste diversion initiatives, including consideration of economic factors.
5. Will inform **policy decisions** on food waste reduction and recycling methods and goals.
6. Analyzes where additional **investment, technical assistance and education** may be needed.

WISCONSIN  
**Food Waste**  
Evaluation



November 2025



# Foodservice Sector Technical Assistance

- DNR has contracted with City of Milwaukee and Dane County to serve Brown, Dane and Milwaukee counties.
- This partnership will provide statewide technical assistance (non-regulatory) and services to local governments, businesses, institutions, and farms on projects that prevent or divert food waste. Assistance may include:
  - one-on-one consultations and customized recommendations
  - information and solutions for food waste reduction, food donation, and food scraps recycling
  - information on project funding opportunities.
  - Efforts will be made to connect with and offer services to disadvantaged communities.
- Project expands a successful “Feed Milwaukee” Pilot Project offering CET No-Cost Waste Analyses for MKE and Dane County food service sector to other food waste generators.



**DANE COUNTY  
WASTE +  
RENEWABLES**

# DNR Policy Developments

## Recycling Rule (WA-13-21)

- Revision effective 7/1/25 added **food waste composting** (and batteries) to the list of topics that local government responsible units for recycling (RUs) must educate residents on.
  - **Public outreach materials** available for use at no cost from DNR.

## Proposed Non-landfill Rule (WA-14-24) in drafting stage

- Preliminary hearing held in January and Statement of Scope approved in February.
- Rule would amend portions of chs. NR 500, 502, 518, 520, 526 and 157, Wis. Adm. Code, to make a number of updates including solid waste facilities, transporters, exemptions, licensing fees, and treatment of special kinds of waste.
- Compost code updates (ch. NR 502.12, Wis. Adm. Code) will provide clarity on who needs licensing approval to facilitate **food waste composting**.
  - Next year economic impact analysis and public comment period
  - Rules won't be adopted until 2027 and effective until early 2028
  - NR 502.12: Yard, farm, food residuals and source-separated compostable material composting facilities

**Rule drafting**  
Spring 2025-spring 2026



**Economic impact analysis**  
Comment period: Summer 2026



**Public hearing on proposed rule**  
Fall 2026



**Adoption by NRB**  
Winter 2026-spring 2027



**Legislative review**  
Fall 2027



**Rule published and effective**  
Early 2028

# DNR outreach

- New webpages published with food waste reduction and landfill diversion tips for different sectors
  - Understanding Sustainable Management of Food
  - Reducing Food Waste at Home
  - Reducing Food Waste: Businesses & Communities
- Organics Management News monthly e-newsletter (Subscribe [here](#).)
- Featured topics published regularly in DNR Outdoor Report, social media channels
- Next annual holiday waste media briefing: Thurs., Dec. 11

## SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF ORGANICS


PREVENTION, REDUCTION AND ALTERNATIVES TO DISPOSAL

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) 2020-2021 Statewide Waste Characterization Study found that organics such as wasted food, food scraps and yard waste make up about 30% of the waste stream going to landfills in Wisconsin. Organic waste is material that is biodegradable and comes from either plants or animals.


- [Wisconsin's 2020-2021 Waste Characterization Study Reports and Images](#)
- [What is Ending Up in Wisconsin Landfills? Infographic \(PDF\)](#)

Diverting organics from disposal saves landfill space and reduces methane emissions from landfills. Recycling organics can transform the materials into resources like compost, a nutrient-rich soil amendment, or renewable energy through anaerobic digestion. Everyone can do their part to divert organics from landfills and redirect them to more sustainable outlets.


To conserve valuable resources and landfill space, Wisconsin's recycling law prohibits landfill disposal of yard materials (also called "yard waste"), including leaves, grass clippings, brush and pieces of wood (branches, sticks, etc.) under 6 inches in diameter.




UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF FOOD




REDUCING FOOD WASTE AT HOME




REDUCING FOOD WASTE - BUSINESS AND COMMUNITIES



COMPOSTING



WISCONSIN RECYCLING AND SOLID WASTE STUDIES AND REPORTS



RECYCLING EDUCATION & OUTREACH

**Managing waste and materials**

**Related Links**

- [Financial responsibility](#)
- [Public comment opportunities](#)
- [Report a complaint](#)
- [Waste facility and transporter approvals and licensing](#)

**Additional Resources**

- [Subscribe to Organics Management News](#)
- [Sustainable Management of Organics](#)
- [Sustainable Management of Food](#)
- [Reducing Food Waste at Home](#)
- [Reducing Commercial and Community Food Waste](#)
- [Composting in Wisconsin](#)
- [Licensed Businesses That May Accept Or Haul Your Waste](#)
- [EPA: Sustainable Management Of Food](#)

**For more information, contact:**

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Recycling and Solid Waste Section Manager  
Waste and Materials Management

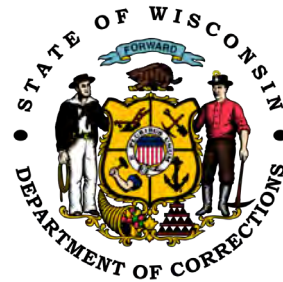


# Recent collaborations on food waste reduction and landfill diversion

## Other Wisconsin state agencies

- Composting in Corrections Peer Network
- DNR Green & Healthy Schools Wisconsin

2026 Waste in Schools Publication



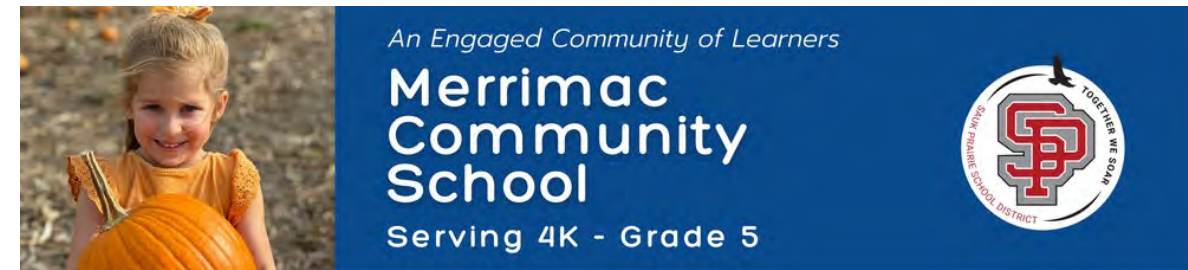
## Other agencies, organizations, and communities

- Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW): Organics Reduction and Compost Committee
- Wisconsin Chapter of U.S. Composting Council

## 2025 DNR Recycling Excellence Awards

One third (seven) of the 21 Recycling Excellence Award Winners announced in November highlight food-waste reduction and diversion initiatives.

1. Dane County Department of Waste + Renewables
2. Sustain Dane (Dane County)
3. Oshkosh Correctional Institution (Winnebago County)
4. Badger Prairie Needs Network (Dane County)
5. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Milwaukee County)
6. WasteCap Resource Solutions (Milwaukee County)
7. Merrimac Community School (Sauk County)



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