

# Wisconsin DNR organics management updates

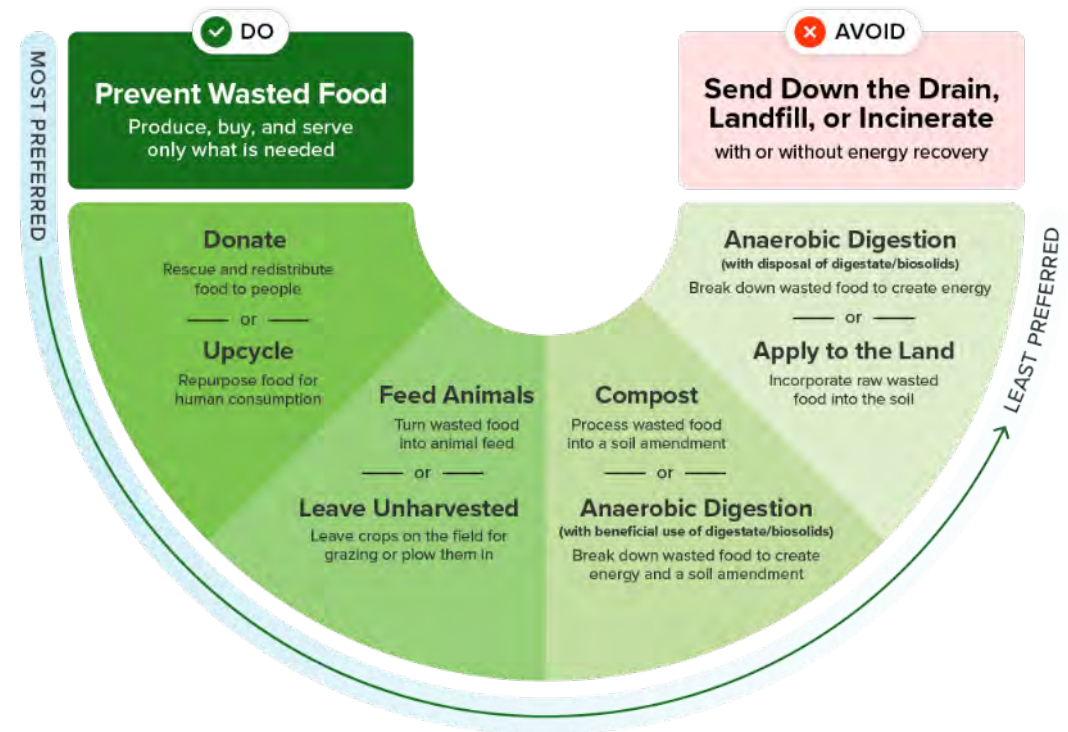
Wisconsin Council on Recycling meeting

March 6, 2026

Sarah Murray, DNR

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

- Objective: to reduce by half per-capita food waste disposed of in Wisconsin landfills by 2030 (from 2020 levels)
  - Focus on education, infrastructure and measurement
- Current grant/project: Oct. 2023 to Sept. 2026
- Potential for additional 3 years of funding



# Key SWIFR project efforts to date

Wisconsin Food  
Waste Evaluation

Public outreach

Policy  
development

Collaboration with  
other agencies  
and organizations

Non-regulatory  
technical  
assistance to  
foodservice sector

# Foodservice sector technical assistance

- Contract with Dane County to work with foodservice establishments in Brown, Dane and Milwaukee counties.
- Provide non-regulatory technical assistance to different types of foodservice providers (restaurants, institutional cafeterias, etc.)
  - 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.
- Expands a successful pilot project offering CET No-Cost Waste Analyses for MKE and Dane County foodservice sector to other food waste generators

# DNR outreach efforts

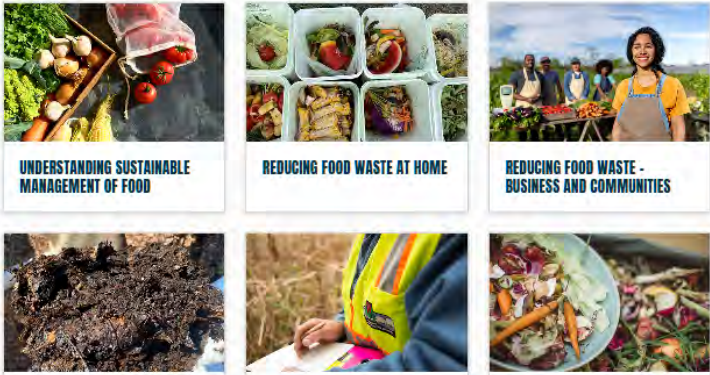
**SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF ORGANICS**  
PREVENTION, REDUCTION AND ALTERNATIVES TO DISPOSAL

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](#)

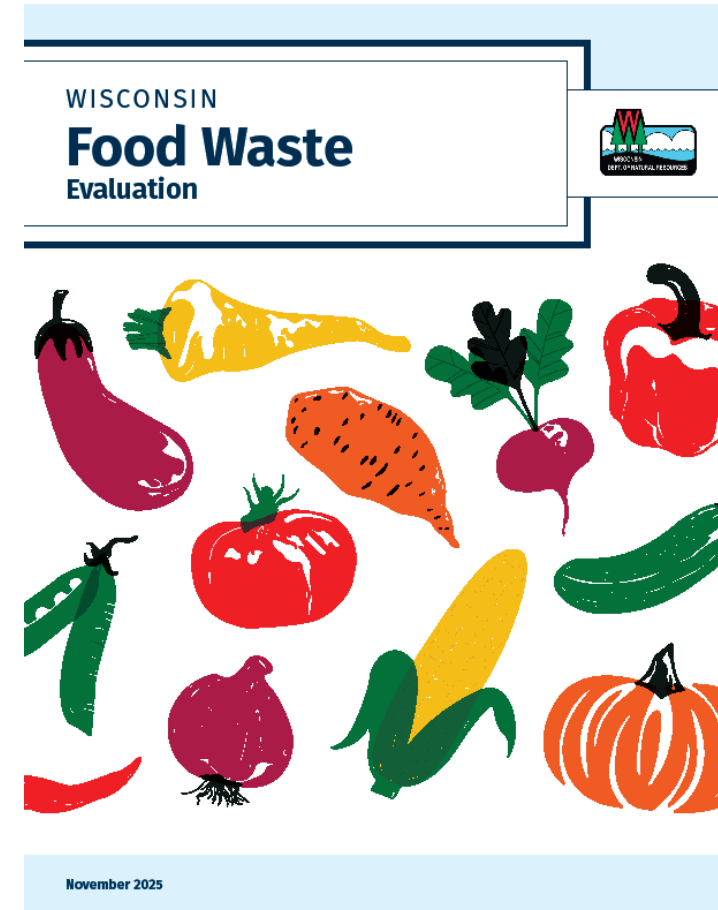
**For more information, contact:**

**Sarah Murray**  
Recycling and Solid Waste Section Manager  
Waste and Materials Management

- New webpages with food waste reduction and landfill diversion tips for different sectors
- Monthly Organics Management News and featured topics in DNR Outdoor Report, plus social media
- Communications plan includes news releases, media briefings, social media

# Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation

- Provides a baseline to evaluating future efforts
- Identifies key policy recommendations to reach food waste reduction goal
- Will serve as basis for a statewide food waste management efforts
- All stakeholders can use the report to identify opportunities



# Project Background

**Wisconsin set a goal to reduce per-capita food waste disposal in landfills by 50% by 2030 and to reduce methane emissions.**

- ➔ Wasted food/food scraps accounted for 20% of trash sent to landfills—*the largest single category*
- ➔ Estimated **854,000 tons** annually, **294 pounds per person**
- ➔ **Three-quarters** of food could have been eaten
- ➔ Goal to reduce food waste to landfills, which wastes **resources, time** and **money**



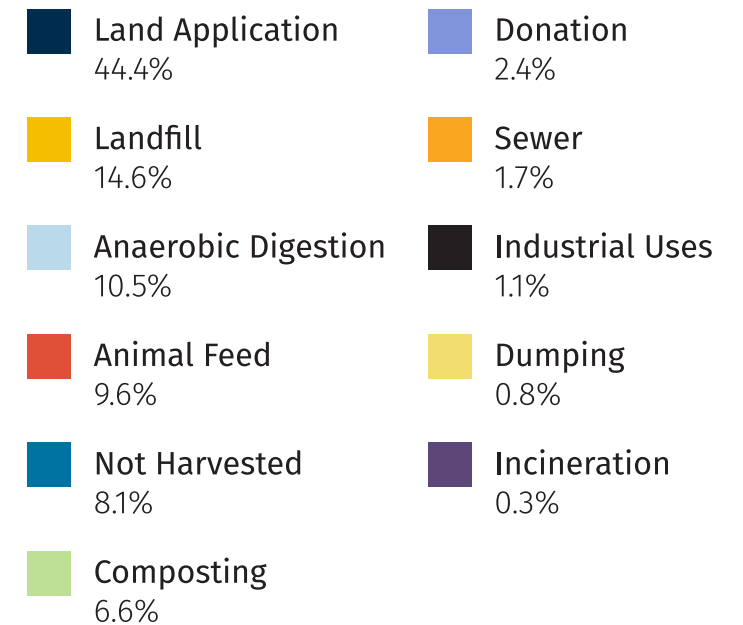
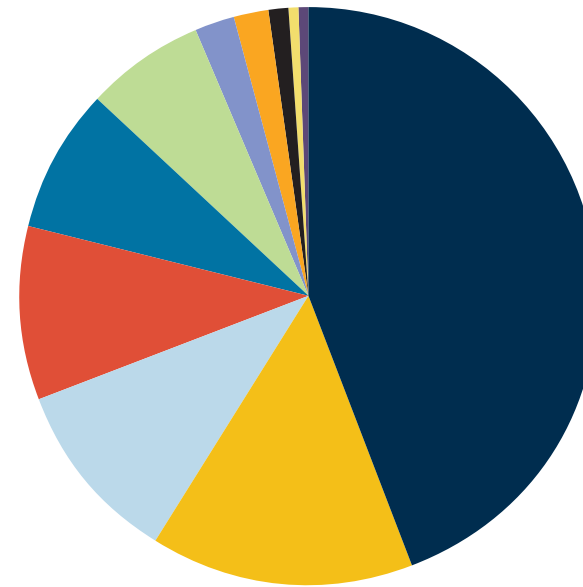
# Food Waste Destinations



Approximately 44% of food waste goes to land application

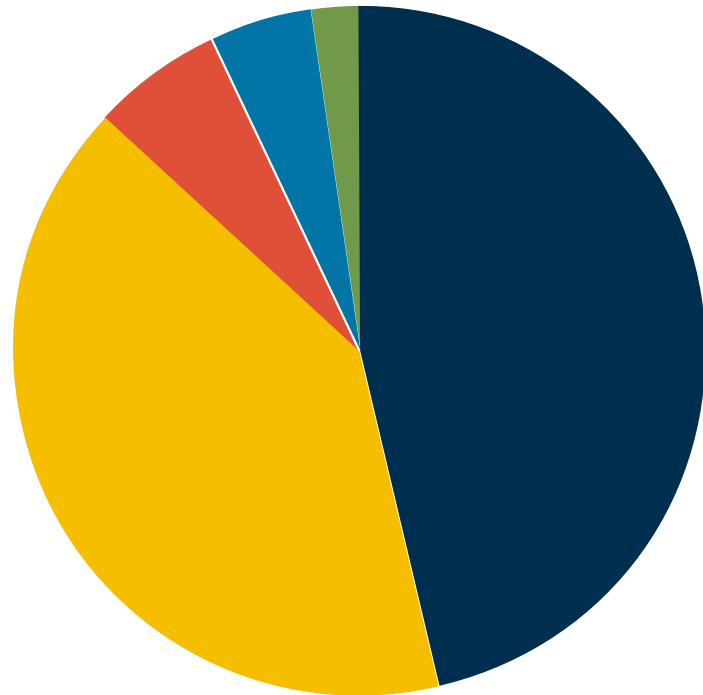


Landfills managed more than 900,000 tons of food waste in 2024



*ReFED Estimate of Wisconsin Food Waste Destination*

# Food Waste to Landfill



## Residential

209,000 tons (47%)



## Retail

23,400 tons (5%)



## Food Service

182,000 tons (41%)



## Farm (produce only)

8,600 tons (2%)



## Manufacturing

25,800 tons (6%)

*ReFED Estimate of Wisconsin Food Waste to Landfill by Sector*

# Existing Infrastructure - Composting

- **286 licensed composting facilities**, including 30 approved to accept food waste
- **License-exempt facilities** also managing food waste
- Facilities managed **1.6 million CY** of organic materials



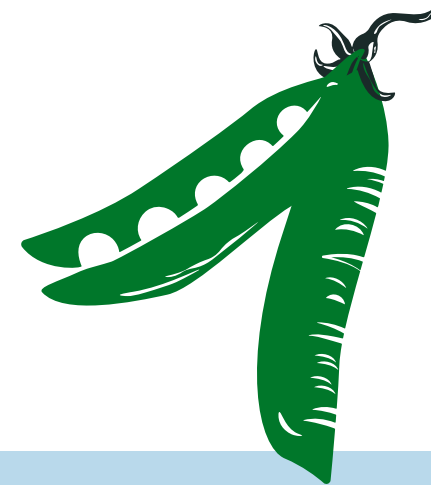
# Recommendations - Composting

- Opportunities for **expanded capacity** would require new technology and enhanced processes
- **Existing facilities** do not have enough capacity to manage all food waste
- Identified challenges including:
  - Regulatory considerations
  - Capital and operational costs
  - Food waste transportation
  - Feedstocks
  - End market demand
  - Potential partners



# Recommendations – Processing Infrastructure

- Review siting, zoning, and permitting to address barriers
- Policies to use landfill tipping fees to incentivize diversion
- Strong end markets
- Promote on-site management



# Existing Infrastructure - Hauling

- **1,260 licensed solid waste haulers**, approximately **130** reported hauling for food waste
- Regional community composters

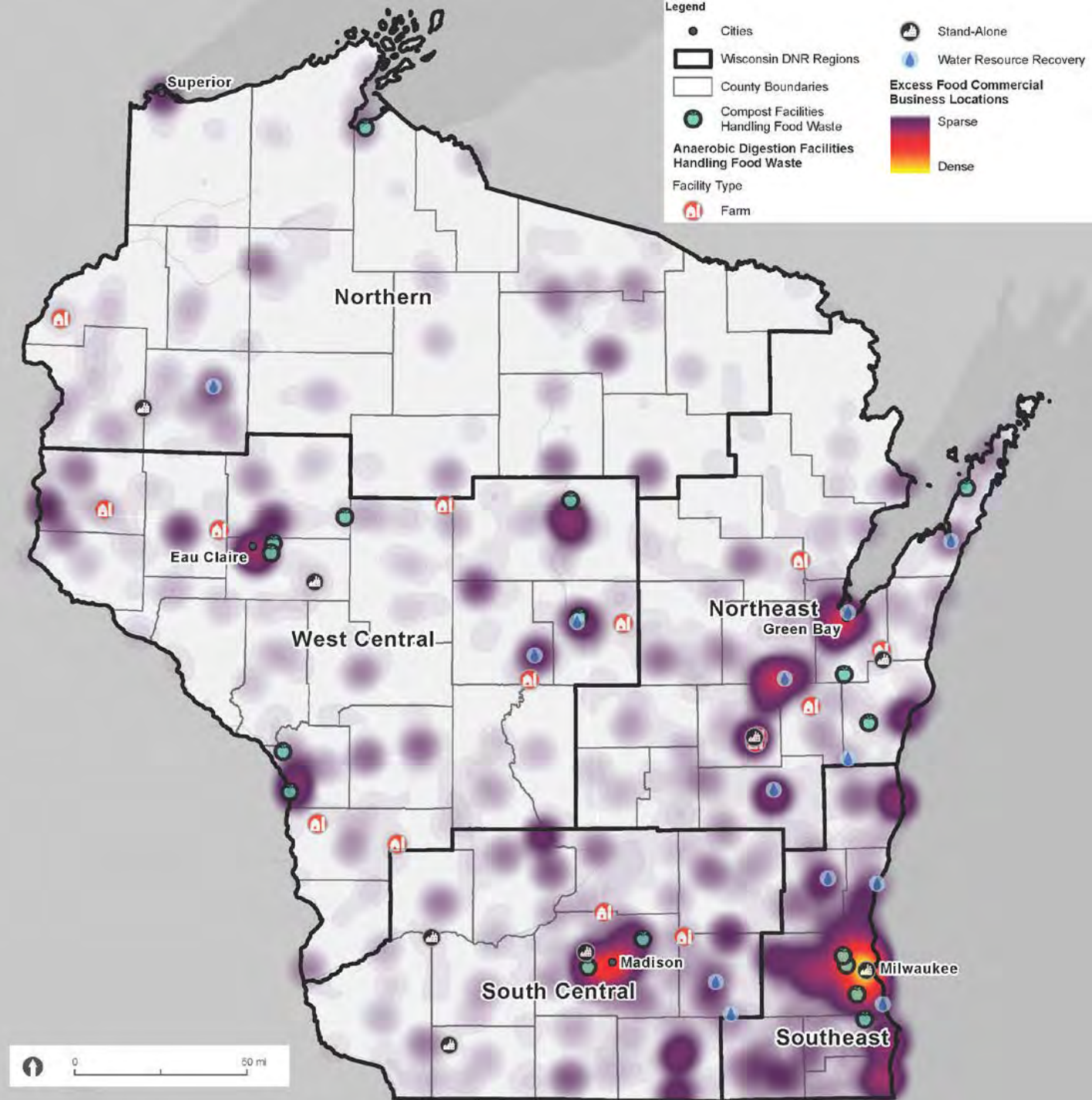


**Opportunities** in densely populated areas and near processing infrastructure

**Challenges** include lack of convenient processing facilities, lack of interest/customer density, cost of service, regulatory concerns, and nuisance/odor issues

# Processing & Infrastructure Needed

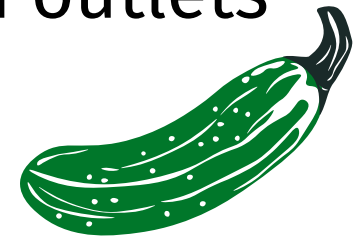
Processing capacity beneficial in the South Central, Southeast, and Northeast regions



# Prioritizing Actions: Near-Term

Actions identify immediate opportunities without significant costs, time, or regulatory requirements

- Educational programs and campaigns
- Local partners
- Expanding food rescue using existing industries and outlets
- Explore new composting facility opportunities



# Prioritizing Actions: Medium-Term

Actions identify opportunities that require more effort, funding, or partner support

- Regulations/policies to promote expanded food donation
- Grants/technical assistance for food waste generators
- Technical support for WI-specific industries and agriculture
- Regional approaches



# Prioritizing Actions: Long-Term

Actions identify opportunities for significant diversion through regulations, infrastructure, and private industry

- Siting locations for new processing facilities
- Financial support for food waste diversion, including higher landfill tipping fees
- Food waste diversion requirements



# Thank you!

**READ THE FULL REPORT:**



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# Next steps

- Fill current DNR staff vacancy to focus on SWIFR work
- Complete current SWIFR grant work
  - Continue work on key activities
  - Use Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation as basis for discussions with stakeholders to identify priorities for next steps
  - Develop data collection and measurement methods to track progress toward state food waste reduction and diversion goals and objectives
- Work with EPA to develop workplan and receive approval for 2<sup>nd</sup> round of funding to continue these efforts

# Questions for Council on Recycling



Initial reactions to report's findings?



Do you see follow-up actions DNR should prioritize?



Are there recommendations the Council would like to research/advocate for?

# CONNECT WITH US

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OFF THE RECORD"