

Updates on Wisconsin DNR Food Waste Reduction Efforts

Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation webinar

Feb. 3, 2026

Sarah Murray, Wisconsin DNR

Webinar agenda

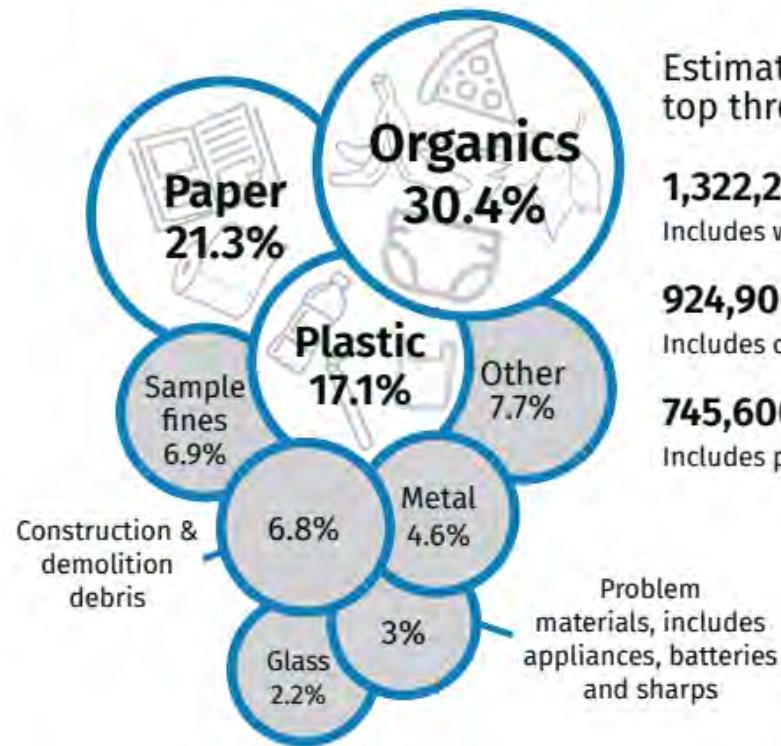
Background and
overview of DNR's food
waste reduction efforts

Wisconsin Food Waste
Evaluation results
overview

Q&A and next steps

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

Wasted food

14.5%

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%)



Other flexible films

7.2%



Food scraps

6%



Textiles

5.5%



Compostable paper

5.3%



20% Wasted Food and Food Scraps

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

- **Objective:** Reduce by half the per-capita food waste disposed of in Wisconsin landfills by 2030 (from 2020 levels)
 - Education: Increase awareness of food waste impacts on Wisconsin people and businesses and ways to mitigate those impacts
 - Increased capacity: Build infrastructure options and capability for food waste management
 - **Measurement:** Develop methods to measure changes in capacity and awareness
- 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

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



DNR outreach efforts

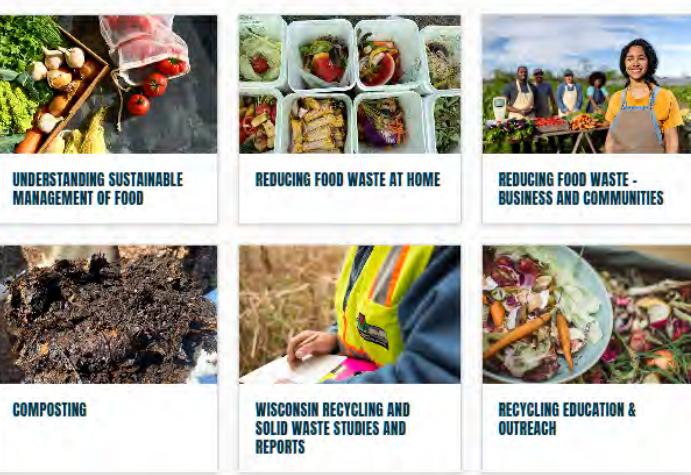
SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF ORGANICS
PREVENTION, REDUCTION AND ALTERNATIVES TO DISPOSAL

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.



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

Policy development

Recycling rule (WA-13-21), 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.

Proposed non-landfill rule (WA-14-24) in drafting stage

- Compost code updates (ch. NR 502.12, Wis. Adm. Code) will provide clarity on who needs licensing approval to facilitate **food waste composting**.
 - Economic impact analysis and public comment period in summer/fall 2026
 - 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

Fact Sheet: Composting Food Waste and Other Source-Separated Compostable Materials at Yard Residuals Facilities



PUB-WA-2046

This document provides an explanation of requirements in ch. NR 502, Wis. Adm. Code, for operators of a licensed yard residuals composting facility that would like to add a separate small-scale food waste or other source-separated compostable material (SSCM) compost facility on the same property.

If your plan is to mix all the yard residuals with the food waste or other SSCM, you will need to convert your licensed yard residuals compost facility to a licensed SSCM compost facility and follow applicable requirements.

If you have questions about which requirements apply to a specific situation or activity, contact the Department of Natural Resources waste management specialist for the county your facility is located in by searching "compost" as the subject area in the [DNR's staff directory](#).

Terms and Background

Food waste: In this document, food waste means compostable food that is not being eaten, such as fruit, vegetable and bread scraps; coffee grounds and tea leaves; eggshells; and food-soiled paper. This can also include meat scraps and certified compostable bags, plates and utensils, but these items may take more time and management to effectively compost.

Source-separated compostable material: SSCM is a regulatory term used in solid waste code regulations that refers to all the wastes that can be composted under a solid waste compost facility license. It includes food waste, plant waste (including crops and aquatic plants), fruit and vegetable food processing waste, fish processing waste, yard waste, manure and animal bedding from herbivorous (non-meat-eating) animals that are not deer or elk, clean chipped wood and sawdust, non-recyclable compostable paper and certified compostable plastics. For the definition, see [§ NR 500.03\(219m\), Wis. Adm. Code](#).

Adding less than 50 cubic yards of food waste or other SSCM

A compost facility with the capacity of 50 cubic yards or less and that contains only food waste or other SSCM does not need a state solid waste approval or a compost facility license. Any local regulations still apply. The facility's capacity includes the volume of raw food waste or other SSCM (feedstock) plus the volume of compost being processed but does not include the volume of finished compost.

To operate a less than 50 cubic yard compost facility that only contains food waste or other SSCM:

- Keep the food waste or SSCM pile separate and distinct from yard-residuals-only compost piles on the property to maintain their reduced regulatory requirements.

DNR Waste & Materials Management Program

PUB-WA-2046

Collaborations on food waste reduction and landfill diversion

Wisconsin state agencies

- DOC: Composting in Corrections Peer Network
- DOA: Compost collection in state buildings
- DNR Green & Healthy Schools Wisconsin

Other 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

- 11 of the 21 winners announced in November 2025 highlight food-waste reduction and diversion initiatives.



Foodservice sector technical assistance

- Finalizing contracts with City of Milwaukee and Dane County to serve 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



HDR presentation on Wisconsin Food Wate Evaluation

Amanda Erickson, HDR

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 2nd round of funding to continue these efforts

Questions?



CONNECT WITH US

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OFF THE RECORD"