The latest news in composting and scrap wood management

January 1998 Volume 6 Number 11 50% Total Recovered Fiber 20% Post-Consumer

Composting News

National standards proposed for organic food

By Ken McEntee

The USDA last month published proposed standards toward the implementation of a program to strengthen the market for organically-grown food.

While the proposal favors the use of animal manure as a fertilizer and soil enhancement, USDA is not, at this point, considering biosolids as allowable for organic farming. The department, however, is requesting comments related to the biosolids issue prior the establishment of its final standards. Comments on any part of the proposal are due by Mar. 16, 1998.

Although organic-food is typically assumed to refer to food that is grown without synthetic chemicals, USDA included in the proposal a list of acceptable synthetic substances approved for use in the production and handling of organically-produced products.

Although the use of yard trimmings and other organics is favorable as a soil amendment in the proposal, USDA expresses some concern about groundwater contamination caused by some organics applied to the land.

Clearing the confusion

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the proposed regulations, which were published in the Federal Register on Dec. 16, 1997,

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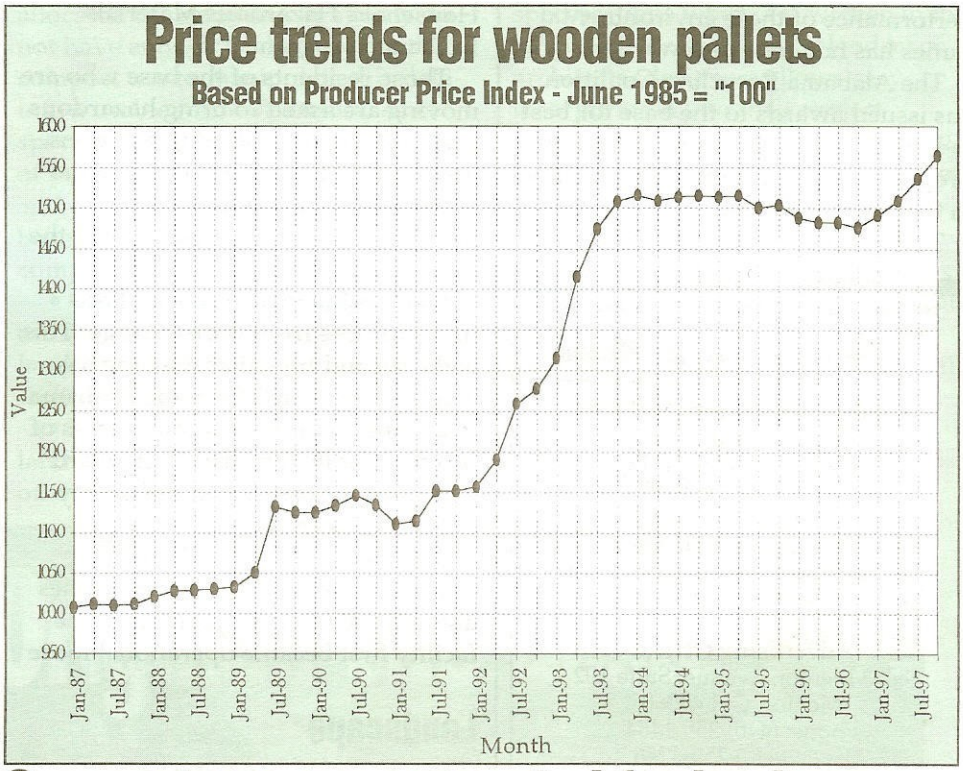

Compost-use specs created for landscape architecture and design

By Ron Alexander

Compost production has grown as a well-accepted method to manage agricultural, industrial and municipal by-products.

Market research conducted by Battelle in 1992 showed that about nine million tons of compost per year were being produced and that 51 million tons per year could potentially be produced by the end of the century.

Whether this quantity of compost is produced or not will be largely based on economic criteria regarding composting as a waste management technique as well as the development of compost markets.

To date the largest "paying" market for compost nationally is the horticultural industry. In 1992 it was estimated that five million tons of compost were being utilized by the

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Highlights

Composting takes off at Alabama Air Force base

By Karen Dael

At the Maxwell Air Force Base and Gunter Annex in Alabama, recycling and composting have become just as much a part of military life as drills and calisthenics. The exemplary performance of these environmental duties has not gone unrewarded.

The Alabama Recycling Coalition has issued awards to the base for best in-house waste reduction/recycling program and best composting facility in the state.

The Qualified Recycling Program on base includes collection of not simply paper, plastic and glass but also such non-typical recyclables as used oil filters and fluorescent light tubes. The award in this category also points to the efforts of the base's new Household Hazardous Materials Exchange program.

Those residents of the base who are moving are asked to bring hazardous materials such as cleaning solutions, insecticides, lighter fluids and other such items that they may be more likely to throw away than pack to the exchange.

New residents can collect these items for free from the exchange. This is the second time that the base has received an award from the Alabama Recycling Coalition for the success of its compost facility. The first award was given in 1995 when the facility was just a year old.

The outdoor windrow facility covers about 4.6 acres and processes about 3,000 tons per year. Since the facility first became operational more than 10,000 tons of green material has been diverted from the landfill and composted for topsoil and mulch. The products are applied on-base for construction repair and general landscaping of public areas, including two nearby golf courses.

Some of the material is bagged and given away to base residents in the spring for their own lawn and garden projects.

According to Richard Harris, pollution prevention manager of the facility, this is really only the beginning for the facility. The next step in composting will be to look toward food scrap composting using materials collected from commissaries.

Mike Forster, Alabama state recycling coordinator, commended the base for success in its commitment to recycling and composting and expects that such a comprehensive program can be used as a model for organizations and municipalities alike.

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Landscape

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horticultural industry - including the landscaping industry - and that markets could grow to 15 million tons per year.

In the state of Washington horticultural markets also are the largest paying markets for compost and have a similar growth potential.

In King County for example, landscapers use about 80 percent of the compost marketed in the county. Washington State market studies - as well as studies completed throughout the United States - have shown that a series of simple steps can be taken to improve markets for compost. The steps are to:

- Illustrate how compost should be used properly;
- Assist end users to identify the type of product they should utilize for a specific application;
- Develop specifications for the use of compost products;
- Assist compost manufacturers to identify product related requirements of end user groups.

Bridging the gap

Over the past several years, the Composting Council has sought funding to bridge those technical and communication gaps. Through national funding, some of which was provided by the CWC (formerly the Clean Washington Center), the Composting Council has developed a series of compost use guidelines which outline instructions relative to the utilization of compost as well as data describing the compost product to specify.

These research-based documents have been distributed throughout the United States.

In order to further disseminate information and educate end users, the compost use guidelines were developed into the *Field Guide to Compost Use*. This publication condensed data found in the compost-use guidelines and honed the information into step-by-step instructions for compost use.

The major goal of producing the *Field Guide to Compost Use* was to provide compost use and purchasing data in an easy-to-read manner which would allow more widespread usage. However, to further expand the utilization of this data, it must be provided to individuals and companies which design landscape projects.

Landscape-specific specs needed

The data found in both the compost use guidelines and the *Field Guide to Compost Use* can be modified by specifiers like landscape architects, purchasing agents, transportation department officials, etc. to create landscape architecture/design specifications.

However, history has shown that this typically does not occur.

Specifying agencies have not allocated the resources or simply do not have enough background with compost use to manipulate this data into a usable form. Therefore, since specifiers greatly impact which types of products are utilized on landscape and other construction projects, it has been necessary to modify the existing compost use data into:

- Compost use specifications which are written in the format in which landscape architects/ designers commonly use;
- Specifications which allow landscape architects/designers and other specifiers to "cut and paste" a full specifications package without requiring extensive knowledge regarding compost use;
- Specifications which promote and illustrate compost as an equal or alternative to other typical landscape products (e.g. peat based products).

Providing the industry with specifications which are written in the language/format used by landscape architects/designers allows easy incorporation into their project specifications, thereby removing any barriers regarding the specification of compost.

By providing a generic specification which can be modified as deemed appropriate in different geographical regions under various soil and climatic conditions, the specifiers will have the ability to adapt the generic information to meet their specific

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requirements.

The other added benefit of creating this information is that it can easily be provided to state agencies, making it much simpler for them to specify and procure compost.

Developing the specs

The development of the *Landscape Architecture/Design Specifications for Compost Use* involved a diverse group of individuals from the compost and landscape industries as well as academia. The process not only included members of the Composting Council, but also members of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) and the Association of Professional Landscape Designers (APLD).

The first step of the process entailed a national data search to identify and obtain standard landscape architect specifications (formats).

Standard specifications were obtained by soliciting members and friends of the Composting Council who have had interaction with landscape architects/designers as well as by directly contacting landscape architects/designers, their trade associations and academics involved in the industry.

Specifications formats were also provided by ARCOM Master Systems and the National Institute of Building Sciences, both of which market and disseminate standard landscape specifications throughout the design industry.

In order to obtain industry consensus, the format related information was presented at one of the Composting Council's Market Development Committee meetings in order to obtain approval of and comments on the format choices. Once standard formats were chosen, the process of infusing compost use data previously gathered through the development of the compost-use guidelines and the *Field Guide to Compost Use* ensued.

Long and short landscape architect specifications for compost use were developed for compost used as:

- A soil amendment for planting beds;
- Tree and shrub backfill mix component;
- Soil amendment for turf establishment/renovation;
- Landscape mulch;
- Soil mulch for erosion control.

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As the long and short specifications were developed, they were reviewed, commented on, upgraded and finalized by a select group within the Composting Council's Market Development Committee.

Permission was then obtained to use a large portion of the text developed for the *Field Guide to Compost Use* within the planned stand-alone landscape architect specifications document.

The addition of data pertaining to the benefits of compost use, quality related issues, etc. was included in the overall package in order to provide the landscape architecture/design industry with more technical information and background regarding the use of compost. Once completed, the stand-alone specifications package was forwarded to a 40-person review team of landscape architects and designers throughout the country for its review and comment.

More than 40 percent of the review team (17 firms) responded with comments or overall approval.

The landscape architect/designer review team was developed by obtaining input from the president of the Washington Chapter of the ASLA, the president of the APLD and by obtaining names of potential firms from the Composting Council members. Extensive revisions were not required within the landscape architecture/design specifications package as many of the firms using compost were pleased with the package and felt it was very helpful.

Dissemination and promotion

Dissemination of the landscape architecture/design specifications package will be managed by the Composting Council. The council is currently reproducing and marketing the package throughout the landscape and composting industry.

A sample of the completed package were provided to the ASLA and the APLD in order to promote the specifications within the landscape industry and the package was promoted at the ASLA's National Conference in November 1997.

To ensure wide distribution and usage of the specifications for compost several entities were engaged to provide editorial review of the specifications as well as assist in dissemination. These groups included the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Association of Professional Landscape Designers, ARCOM Master Systems and the National Institute of Building Sciences.

The latter two entities develop and disseminate standard landscape

specifications to the specifying industry.

Early in the process, these two groups agreed that compost-related data was needed within their current specifications packages in order to keep up with current landscape trends. As such, they not only agreed to become involved in a review capacity but also solicited the project team to review and upgrade their current specifications package to include this technical compost-use information.

All of the feedback provided to ARCOM Master System and the National Institute of Building Sciences was reviewed and approved by the Composting Council's Market Development Committee. Both entities are currently reviewing our comments and are in the process of upgrading their specifications package.

Parties interested in ordering the landscape architecture/design specifications package should contact the Composting Council directly, at (301) 652-5066.

Alexander is product marketing specialist/senior scientist at E&A Environmental Consultants Inc., in Cary, North Carolina. He has more than 13 years of experience in compost marketing and end-use and is co-chair of the Compost Council's Market Development Committee.

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Organics

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would govern USDA's National Organic Program.

"The National Organic Program will strengthen one of the fastest growing segments of the agriculture and food economy," Glickman said. "Although around for nearly 40 years, just since 1986 the market for organic' food has exploded, growing over 40-fold so that by 1996, sales totaled $3.5 billion. In spite of this growth and the enormous potential this market promises, America's farmers, especially our small farmers, still have to navigate a confusing, sometimes conflicting, patchwork of some 40 state and private certification programs."

Glickman said the new rules, by setting a uniform national standard and leveling the playing field, will open the door to a new market and new economic opportunities for farmers.

"Just as important, the rules are going to clear up the confusion that sometimes exists in the minds of consumers, processors and merchandisers about what is and what is not organic," he said. "The proposed rule requires that imports meet equivalent standards, so if foreign producers want to sell their organic' products in the United States, they will have to meet the same criteria as domestic farmers."

The proposed standards define "organic" as agricultural products produced through a natural versus synthetic process. They also address the methods, practice, and substances used in producing and handling crops and livestock and their processed products, including producing and handling organic agricultural products; labeling of organic products; certification of organic operations; accreditation of state and private certifying agents; compliance testing; equivalency of foreign organic certification programs; approval of state organic programs; and user fees.

Authority for rule

The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) of 1990, passed upon the urging of organics food growers and marketers, provides authority for the proposed rule. The proposed rule was

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