

## Management of Waste in Virginia

In Virginia, solid waste is managed at the local level. The Virginia Waste Management Act<sup>1</sup> requires that all designated regions “develop comprehensive and integrated solid waste management plans.”<sup>2</sup> This requirement means that the management of waste in Virginia is determined at the local level by 71 different solid waste planning units. These units are required to maintain an approved solid waste management plan and follow the [Solid Waste Planning and Recycling Regulations](#).<sup>3</sup>

Solid waste planning units are required to meet a mandatory recycling rate, but there is no specific language in the current regulations that outlines how municipalities should manage organic waste. In 2023, landfills in Virginia accepted almost fifteen million tons of MSW material. Of that amount, 29% was from outside of Virginia, with Maryland, New York, Washington D.C., New Jersey, and North Carolina being the top contributors.<sup>4</sup> Of the states in the region, Virginia has a relatively low tipping fee, meaning that it can be cheaper for states to send their waste to Virginia.<sup>5</sup>

The capacity of Virginia’s MSW landfills is expected to support the needs of the Commonwealth for 20.1 more years.<sup>6</sup> On average food waste accounts for 24% of landfilled material.<sup>7</sup> EO 17 notes that “food waste is the single largest substance by volume sent to solid waste sites across Virginia and the United States.”<sup>8</sup> Diverting food scraps from landfills can help increase landfill capacity and prevent the release of methane gas.

The information included represents a high-level overview of relevant laws and regulations and should not be used as legal guidance.



*Impact of Landfilled Food on Methane Emissions*

<sup>1</sup> Sections 10.1-1400 through 10.1-1458 of the Code of Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/our-programs/land-waste/solid-hazardous-waste/solid-waste/local-state-and-regional-solid-waste-planning>

<sup>3</sup> <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title9/agency20/chapter130/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/24299/638551795838170000>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/24299/638551795838170000>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/24299/638551795838170000>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/land-research/quantifying-methane-emissions-landfilled-food-waste>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/governor-of-virginia/pdf/eo/EO-17-Recognizing-The-Value-of-Recycling-and-Waste-Reduction.pdf>

### Food Waste in Virginia

In the Commonwealth, there are some existing efforts to prevent wasted food from being landfilled. DEQ has permitted over a dozen compost facilities. Out of these facilities, DEQ has been in contact with seven facilities who confirmed that they were actively accepting and processing food scraps. In addition to these facilities, there are several yard waste composting facilities in Virginia which could be upgraded to accept and process food waste.

Some smaller scale composting exists in the Commonwealth and can take place without a permit. Composting activities performed for educational purposes are allowed as long as no more than 100 cubic yards of materials are onsite at any time. Greater quantities are allowable if a suitable justification is presented to DEQ for review and approval prior to composting.

Composting of pre-consumer food waste and kitchen culls generated onsite and composted in containers designed to prohibit vector attraction and prevent nuisance odor generation is also allowed without a permit.<sup>9</sup>

Vermicomposting is allowed without a permit when used to process Category I, Category II, or Category III feedstocks (see below) in containers designed to prohibit vector attraction and prevent nuisance odor generation. If offsite feedstocks are received, no more than 100 cubic yards of materials may be onsite at any one time. For quantities greater than 100 cubic yards, approval from DEQ is required prior to composting.<sup>10</sup>

Owners and operators of agricultural operations can compost Category I feedstocks with herbivorous animal manure generated offsite provided they meet certain criteria and register with DEQ.<sup>11</sup>

#### Feedstock Categories as Reference in Compost Regulations

Feedstock Category	Material Type
Category I	Plant or plant-derived pre-consumer materials
Category II	Animal-derived waste material
Category III	Animal and post-consumer food wastes with pathogen potential
Category IV	Other wastes

More information about the specific materials included in each feedstock category can be found in [9VAC20-81-310](#).

For more information on the regulations around food waste composting in Virginia, please see:

- the [Virginia Solid Waste Management Regulations](#) (VSWMR, 9VAC20-81),
- the [Virginia Pollution Abatement \(VPA\) Permit Regulation](#) (9VAC25-32), and
- the [Sewage Collection and Treatment Regulations](#) (9VAC25-790).

<sup>9</sup> 9VAC20-81-95.D.7

<sup>10</sup> 9VAC20-81-95.D.8

<sup>11</sup> 9VAC20-81-397.B.2

Those who are looking to begin compost processing should contact the regional Solid Waste Permit Writer in DEQ's Division of Land Protection & Revitalization before beginning any planning for new composting operations.

Virginia residents are welcome to start backyard compost piles if they are interested in managing the food scraps created in their home kitchen and using the finished compost on their own property.<sup>12</sup>

While there is no comprehensive approach to preventing or managing wasted food in the Commonwealth, there are a number of programs in place that are intended to keep food out of landfills. At the community level, there are institutions, organizations, and local governments that support food waste prevention, food rescue, and composting, with food scrap collection programs by far the most common. Below are summaries of some of the activities underway across the Commonwealth.

### Municipal Programs

Across the state, local governments have proven to be effective champions of food waste diversion programs. The following list outlines the programs that are underway in different localities.

**City of Alexandria:** All residents of Alexandria with city trash and recycling service also have access to curbside food scrap collection. The city covers the cost of supplies needed for collection and subsidizes the program so that residents who participate pay \$5 a month, or \$55 a year. For residents who are not interested in or eligible for curbside collection, Alexandria also sponsors free food scrap drop off sites at six farmers market locations and provides information for residents who are interested in backyard composting.<sup>13</sup> Alexandria also encourages residents to reduce their food waste through the *Food for Good: Reducing Food Waste in Alexandria*<sup>14</sup> program which highlights food waste reduction tips and emphasizes the associated cost savings.



Figure 1: Food for Good logo from the City of Alexandria

**City of Charlottesville:** Residents can drop off their food scraps in a collection bin at the Charlottesville City Market or a 24/7 accessible compost drop-off location in Downtown Charlottesville. The city also encourages residents to participate in backyard composting.

<sup>12</sup> 9VAC20-81-95.D.2

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.alexandriava.gov/waste/project/curbside-food-waste-composting>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.alexandriava.gov/waste/program/reduce-food-waste>

**City of Fairfax:** The City of Fairfax sponsors a Composting Center adjacent to the city's Community Garden which is accessible 24/7. The city also provides free compost collection caddies and provides residents with information on backyard composting.<sup>15</sup>

**City of Falls Church:** Residents of Falls Church have access to curbside organics collection for \$8 per month. The city also sponsors a public compost collection site behind City Hall that can be accessed 24/7 that anyone in the community can use to dispose of their food scraps.<sup>16</sup>

**City of Manassas:** Residents of Manassas are eligible to participate in curbside organics collection for \$10 per month. The city also sponsors a community drop-off location at the Manassas Farmers Market.<sup>17</sup>

**City of Richmond:** A grant from USDA helped the city launch the Richmond Compost Initiative in 2022. This program supports 21 collection sites for food scraps across Richmond, many of which are located in the city's community gardens. All residents have free access to these compost collection sites. The collected compost is processed at a local farm, and finished compost is donated back to the community gardens and organizations that support compost collection sites.

**Arlington County:** In Arlington, residents have access to compost collection through both curbside collection and on-street collection bins. Arlington has also initiated the On-Street Food Scraps Collection for Multi-family Building Residents program. This program services 14 public compost collection locations in areas with a high density of multi-family housing. The collection bins are linked to an online tool that shows residents where to find a bin, in addition to indicating if a bin is full and needs to be emptied; the county was recognized with a Governor's Environmental Excellence Award for their on-street compost collection program after diverting over 19 tons of food waste in just six months.<sup>18</sup>

**Fairfax County:** Residents of Fairfax County have access to two food scrap drop-off locations: the I-66 Transfer Station and the I-95 Landfill Complex. Food scrap collection is also available at

### Prioritizing Food Waste Prevention in Planning

As DEQ evaluated the existing food scrap collection programs across the Commonwealth, municipally sponsored programs were most commonly found in areas that had made previous commitments to prioritize food waste reduction. In addition to statewide planning efforts, EPA encouraged cities and metropolitan areas to develop climate action plans under the CPRG program. Two of the three regional plans from Virginia include a goal that emphasizes the importance of diverting food waste, the Priority Climate Action Plan for Washington-Arlington-Alexandria DC-MD-VA-WV Metropolitan Statistical Area and the Climate Resilient RVA. Both plans note that they will look for opportunities to expand access to food waste prevention, rescue, and composting programs. Many of the existing municipally sponsored collection programs are concentrated in these geographic areas.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.fairfaxva.gov/government/public-works/operations-division/refuse-recycling/composting>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.fallschurchva.gov/Composting>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.manassasva.gov/public\\_works/trash\\_recycling/food\\_waste\\_composting.php](https://www.manassasva.gov/public_works/trash_recycling/food_waste_composting.php)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Recycling-and-Trash/Residential/Organics-Waste/Composting>

all 10 farmers markets; in 2023, the county collected 65 tons of food waste via these drop-off sites (the county was awarded a Governor's Environmental Excellence Award for their farmers market food scrap collection program).<sup>19</sup>

**Prince William County:** Residents of Prince William County have free access to the Compost Facility Convenience Center, an industrial-scale facility that processes both yard waste and food waste. Non-residents are able to use the facility for a fee. In addition to being accessible to residents, this facility processes compost that is dropped off by approved haulers and commercial users.<sup>20</sup>

### Compost Collection through Private Businesses & Community Organizations

Across the Commonwealth, there are several private companies and community organizations that support compost collection and processing. These programs act as important supplements to food scrap collection, particularly in areas that do not yet have access to municipal compost programs. For instance, in Harrisonburg, a public compost collection site is sponsored by a local environmental organization. The collection site is free and available to all community members. In Northern Virginia, compost collection is available at a regional grocery store chain. A number of private companies offer compost collection services for a fee. These businesses give residents the ability to purchase curbside compost collection services. These businesses collect compost at the local scale. Some businesses bring collected compost to local farms for processing, whereas others partner with commercial level food scrap haulers who transport organic materials to industrial compost facilities. Many of these businesses act as local haulers of compost and work jointly with commercial scale food scrap haulers. In addition to curbside collection, some businesses also offer access to compost drop-off sites that are available to customers who pay a small fee.

### Backyard Composting

Backyard composting is an effective way to manage household food scraps for those that are interested in producing and using compost in a home garden or landscaping. Many Virginia localities actively encourage backyard composting and provide their residents with educational information on how to get started.

In Stafford County, the Rappahannock Regional Solid Waste Management Board (R-Board) developed an outreach program focused on backyard composting. The program aims to educate residents on proper composting techniques and offers composting classes and Mini Compost-A-Thon events, where participants learn about backyard composting from a Master Gardener and receive complimentary compost bins and starter kits. In the program's first two years, more than 1,500 residents participated. The R-Board received an honorable mention in the 2025 Governor's Environmental Excellence Awards for its composting education efforts.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/recycling-trash/composting-and-more>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.pwcva.gov/departments/solid-waste-management/compost-mulch-or-topsoil>

<sup>21</sup> <https://r-board.org/compost/>

# Management of Food Waste

## Food Rescue & Composting Program

Across the Commonwealth, composting programs are the most common efforts to keep food waste out of landfills. In a handful of localities, compost collection programs are accompanied by educational campaigns on food waste prevention, aiming to change consumer behavior.

There are a number of food rescue groups throughout Virginia, with the largest operations in Northern Virginia. These organizations act as a connector between food producers and food donation hubs by coordinating the transportation and logistics that are required in order to bring wholesome food from grocery stores and restaurants to community organizations that provide food to those in need.