

Proposed Changes to the Vermont Mandatory Recycling Law (Act 148)

S.285 & S.287

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Testimony from Sam Carter, 802 535 4670

My main concern with both of these bills is the repeal of the phased-in ban on food waste from landfills. As it stands now a business generating 26 tons of food waste each year is required to separate food waste from other trash and arrange for hauling. Each year the threshold is lowered and by 2020 all food waste will be banned from landfills. Acts S.285 and S.287 if passed as proposed would both eliminate the ultimate ban and the yearly phased-in approach. This is a step in the wrong direction as it will still allow for a large volume of food to enter the landfill, eliminates the incentive for businesses to separate food from trash, and does not treat all generators fairly.

Review of top reasons to separate food waste:

- Recover nutrients by means of food shelves, poultry feed and compost
- Reserve limited and costly (monetarily, environmentally, politically) landfill space for trash that truly cannot be recycled or composted
- Decrease the load on waste water treatment facilities

Review of arguments for the disposal of food waste in the landfill:

- Feed the methane recovery systems at the landfill
- This is the status quo and large rubbish haulers like it this way

The reasons to separate food waste speak for themselves. I will explain why the arguments to continue to dispose of food waste in the landfill are inadequate. Landfills were not intended to act as methane generators, the methane recovery systems are built to mitigate the damage to the climate and safety concerns posed by unchecked landfill gas. In fact the less methane a landfill produces the better, as the methane (roughly 40% by volume in landfill gas) acts a vehicle for much more toxic gases generated by landfills. The revenue generated from burning this gas as fuel is insignificant when compared to the cost of building and maintaining a landfill. Far less expensive methods for methane procurement include tapping sewer and wastewater facilities or building methane digesters.

I can understand why large hauling companies do not want to be required to haul food waste as it is in many ways a quite different business. Food waste really should be picked up once a week, it requires separate specialized containers, vehicles and other equipment. The containers need to be washed and the food waste taken to a facility able to properly handle it.

As a part time business I haul and process between two and ten tons of food waste each week, and am looking to expand. The hauling fees provide me with a reliable income and the food waste supports my poultry flock which in turn feeds my vegetable operation. Over the last few years numerous businesses

like mine have sprung up all over Vermont, providing stable jobs and resiliency in our rural economy. Food shelves have enjoyed a marked increase in donations, attributed to large producers making a more concerted effort to deliver food. We are in the middle of the multi-year process of implementing Act 148 and it is understandable that there are details yet to be figured out. As it stands however Act 148 is solid and working, and is something Vermont legislators and Vermonters should be proud of.

Thanks, Sam Carter