



Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District
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Support for Section 19 of S.160

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The **Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District (CVSWMD)** hauled food residuals from schools and businesses for composting, digesting and poultry feeding for thirteen years, from 2004-2017. CVSWMD serviced 162 businesses and schools within member municipalities of the CVSWMD region and adjacent towns (parts of 3 counties).

- For thirteen years the District contracted with Grow Compost, Black Dirt Farm, Cookeville Compost, Dog River Farm, Vermont Compost and other farms to take these food residuals.
- For all of these years participating restaurants, businesses, nursing homes, hospitals, groceries, quick stops and schools have made clear they are ready to divert organic wastes, to protect the environment, to support local Vermont farmers, and to do their part in mitigating climate change.
- For the last three of these years – from 2014 – 2017, many of these food scrap generators were required by **Vermont's Universal Recycling Law (Act 148)** to separate and divert their scraps from the landfill. In another fifteen months – July 2020 – all Vermont businesses and households will have that same requirement.

The District always envisioned that businesses could be offering food scrap hauling services to organic waste generators. We tested the market, solicited commercial proposals, and in 2017 transitioned our program to a commercial service provider – Grow Compost, from whom this Committee has heard regarding Section 19. Our 162 organics customers utilized the District's service for an average of nearly 5 years; by July 2017 all had transitioned to Grow's hauling service or to other disposal option allowed by law.

I have read the ANR and AAFM documents submitted to you by Cathy Jamieson, and I have heard the testimony of farmers with whom the District has had productive relationships over many years. I hope that the enactment of Section 19 will provide an interim period in which to address stakeholder concerns and to clarify Legislative intent and state policy which, frankly, seems unclear at this time. Let me specify a few concerns:

1. I expect that the management of food scraps as chicken feed by ANR has the potential for increasing operating costs and therefore altering fragile business plans for many small farmers who currently accept scraps, and for depressing the number of local farms who might have been considering accepting food scraps.

Small farm sustainability is a key part of Vermont's strategy for survival of small-town jobs and community life. Organics disposal is part of our emerging "green economy." Over twenty Members have co-sponsored **H.126 concerning a "Zero Waste Economy,"** which specifically calls out the need to recycle food and to increase productivity of farm land.

Most of Vermont's Solid Waste Districts and other waste management entities are now actively participating in food scrap collection or supporting transfer stations that accept scraps. We must have local haulers to transport this material and local capacity for processing food scraps. To keep consumer costs down and serve more of our taxpayer residents, we need a robust selection of potential disposal vectors for food scraps. Our ability to support local businesses and households in meeting the organics requirements of Vermont's Universal Recycling Law (Act 148) is threatened if local disposal options wither. This Body expressed concerns about exactly this issue, and **Act 108 of 2018** directed that ANR should organize a Stakeholder Group to review whether "*sufficient regional capacity to process food residuals is available to allow for the collection of food residuals.*" We must have policies and procedures that maximize the availability of local capacity to process food residuals, and must not go down a road that discourages farm-based capacity.

2. *It is the policy of the state that food residuals collected under the requirements of [Title 10, Chapter 159] shall be managed according to the following order of priority uses:*

- (1) Reduction of the amount generated at the source;*
- (2) Diversion for food consumption by humans;*
- (3) Diversion for agricultural use, including consumption by animals;***
- (4) Composting, land application, and digestion; and***
- (5) Energy recovery.*

This is the policy stated in Vermont's Universal Recycling Law (Act 148). "Food residual" is defined as "source separated and uncontaminated material that is derived from processing or **discarding** of food and that is recyclable."

I notice that this policy calls for management practices that prioritize use of food residuals for agriculture over composting and land application. I notice that Act 148 consistently uses the modifier "**discarded**" when specifying food policy, in contrast to the use of "**disposal**" in defining food residuals.

I see a significant difference: we think of "disposed" items as trash, as waste, past the end of a useful life. "Discarded" food, like obsolete computers or out-sized clothes, seem to be things that have great use for other consumers in other situations. Can't we find the ways to utilize discarded food scraps in the highest and best agricultural uses?

3. AAFM has asserted that “*importing “food residual[s] is not “farming” as defined in Section 2.16 of RAPs.”* It appears that AAFM views food scraps as household and commercial waste fit only for disposal. But that section includes in the first two (of five) definitions of “Farming”:

*a) the cultivation or other use of land for **growing food**, fiber, Christmas trees, maple sap, or horticultural, silvicultural, and orchard crops; or*

*b) the raising, feeding, or management of livestock, **poultry**, fish, or bees;*

Many other materials must be imported onto a farm to accomplish these uses, and those materials are neither included nor excluded from the formal definition. Why is it that food discarded by you or your local pizza shop, which you or your neighbor would feed to your home flock without any concern, as has been done for generations, a practice that is not part of farming?

I thank the Committee for your time, hope that you will enact Section 19, and hope that the interim it provides will give the time and distance for all stakeholders to express their concerns, understand the concerns of other parties, and report back to you on any policy issues that need attention, and on how feeding of food scraps to farm poultry can best be managed.