



MORETOWN AND NORTH HARTLAND

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Amy Sheldon, Chair  
House Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife

Dear Representative Sheldon and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and answer questions this morning. My husband and I started our business, Grow Compost of Vermont in 2008 to build soils and reduce the carbon footprint of our local community. I am testifying this morning to oppose any delay in the full implementation of the Universal Recycling Law as it was enacted unanimously in 2012.

**The Risk** To be clear, my business does rely on this law. As an essential business, my workforce is on the front lines every morning – collecting discarded food scraps from grocery stores, nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, condominiums and apartment complexes. They are taking extreme precautions – working independently, wearing protective gear and washing their hands frequently. My employees are dedicated to do what they do every day because they believe in the law that was created by this legislature to protect our environment, build our soils and keep organic material out of Vermont’s only landfill. Nevertheless, we understand the risks of being an essential business and continuing our work through this pandemic. Our management is attending weekly meetings held by the United States Composting Council to ensure that we have the most up to date advice and direction for the safety and well-being of our employees and our customers. Covid-19 is new and scary and there are many things that scientists do not know specifically about it. However, [scientists](#) tell us that Covid-19 is part of a family of viruses that they do know plenty about – that existing knowledge of the coronaviruses in the environment can be applied here. To date, there is no evidence to suggest that contaminated food leads to infection. (Pat Millner, PhD, US Dept of Agriculture Microbiologist. Her work can be seen [here](#)). We are learning from scientists and experts with prior knowledge and common sense to determine the approach we take in the operation of our business at this time. *The data does not support postponing the landfill ban.*

This law only asks the feedstock generators (individuals or businesses who find themselves with inedible left-over food), to put this material in a separate bin from their trash. The only potential area of concern for the generator is the special bin. Like doorknobs, we need to be cautious of potential contamination. This is true even when we are not facing a specific pandemic. We always encourage our customers to wash their hands after taking out their food scraps. The risk is the same as taking out the garbage. In fact, we have learned there is actually data that points to a decrease in the vitality of this virus due to the increase of microbial activity in decomposing organic material even on the lids and handles of food scrap collection containers. *So in fact, it might be safer to collect food scraps than it is to collect trash.*

After considering the data and advice from scientists and experts, we believe separating food scraps from trash poses no additional risk. Instead, we believe that composting helps our communities to be more resilient and our economy to be stronger. Organic hauling businesses are employing Vermonters, building soils used to grow food locally, supplying anaerobic digesters with feedstock to create green energy, reducing waste and methane production. This law has encouraged new businesses in this industry to emerge and grow. New infrastructure is in the process of being built to provide capacity to manage this material in Vermont and this spring, Vermont residents are spending time at home preparing for the ban and building compost bins. Condos and homeowner associations are moving forward with planning compost programs. Now is not the time to discourage the kind of behavior Vermonters are adapting to be more resilient in face of an environmental crisis.


### **A Resilient Community and a Strong Economy**

This week, Mayor Miro Weinberger announced Burlington's "Green Stimulus Package" to encourage environmentally friendly behavior so that when the economy re-opens we can move forward with a strong economy and a resilient community. On Tuesday he said, "We're not going to stop working on climate emergency even while we're battling Covid-19. In fact, whenever possible, we're going to pursue strategies that advance our progress in both of these crises." The Universal Recycling Law does just this.

When the economy reopens, Vermont is posed to be stronger and more resilient. The future of green business in Vermont is bright. Our 'compost' law is encouraging Vermonters to build gardens and local food production is increasing; organic transfer stations are in the midst of construction; new anaerobic digesters are being sited and built around the state; new small food scrap hauling businesses are being formed (and are seeing *growth* in this crisis). The resiliency of Vermont is directly related to the continuity of the Universal Recycling Law as we near July 1, 2020.

It is crucial to the growth of our green economy and to the clean air, soil and water in Vermont that we continue our initiative toward a greener Vermont and avoid delays in the timeline of this law. I appreciate your attention to this issue. Feel free to reach me at 802-793-5568 or at [lisa@growcompost.com](mailto:lisa@growcompost.com) for further information. We would love to continue this conversation surrounding the role of green businesses during these trying times.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
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Owner