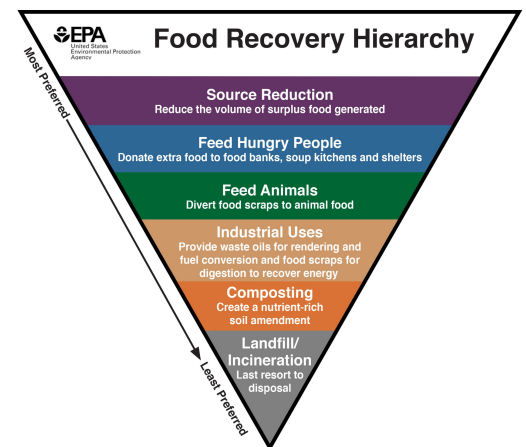


## Municipal Approaches to Reduce Food Waste in MA

According to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, food waste and other organic material make up approximately 21 percent of the total waste stream in the state, equaling 950,000 tons a year in Massachusetts in 2019. Currently, more than a million Massachusetts residents are food insecure, making the disposal of edible food a missed opportunity to better synthesize and strengthen multiple sectors of the food system.

Food waste poses an environmental hazard as well, as discarded organic materials in landfills create methane, a greenhouse gas which contributes to climate change. And landfilling or incinerating food waste is expensive for municipalities and has public health and environmental impacts.

There are many options available to municipalities to help reduce food waste; some ideas are listed below, organized by EPA's hierarchy that prioritizes certain food waste reduction responses. Whether these approaches are appropriate may depend on the town's location, population density, existence of a transfer station, and other resources.



While some of these approaches don't have a significant cost to the municipality, many of the more impactful and more equitable solutions do have a significant cost. However, it is important to note the indirect costs of not diverting food waste to the environment and public health, as well as future costs such as increasing trash disposal costs. As awareness about the negative impacts of food waste rises and participation in school composting and curbside composting programs increase, implementing food waste diversion programs may become easier and more cost effective. Some [state](#) and [federal](#) grants are available to offset some of the costs of a new food waste reduction program.

### Food Waste Source Reduction: Measurement and Education

One of the most effective ways to reduce the amount of food waste generated is to measure the amount of food waste that businesses, institutions, schools, and others create so they can change their ordering, production, and display patterns to address the main sources of food waste.

Municipalities can encourage source reduction through making data collection less expensive.

[Boulder, CO](#) offers waste assessments and [waste reduction plans](#) to local businesses; [Alameda County, CA](#) provides [free licenses of LeanPath software](#) to large hotels and colleges to measure pre-consumer waste; and Hamilton County, Ohio offers [free technical support](#) to commercial kitchens to track food waste and set up food donation programs.



Municipalities can also educate residents about the negative impacts of food waste and how they can help. [Save the Food](#) and [Food Too Good To Waste](#) are two free outreach campaigns that can be adapted for use by municipalities.

## Edible Food Donation

Next, municipalities should encourage businesses and schools to donate edible food to food rescue organizations, food banks and food pantries to help get food to people in need. Municipalities should provide information about the community benefits, the tax incentives, liability protection, and best practices; Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic has written Massachusetts-specific legal [fact sheets](#) on these topics. The Rhode Island Department of Health provides a [one-pager for businesses](#) interested in donating food. Los Angeles County, CA's [Food Redistribution Initiative](#) provides resources and connects businesses with local food rescue organizations and New York City has an [online database](#) to connect businesses and residents to organizations that can receive donated food. RecyclingWorksMA has a [database](#) of food rescue organizations throughout the state and guidance from the state can help schools set up [share tables](#), so students who are not going to eat their unopened food can donate it to others.



## Food Scrap Separation: Composting and AD

After these steps are taken, the remaining food scraps should be composted or sent to anaerobic digestion facilities. Municipalities should provide the infrastructure and incentives to ensure that this diversion is easy and that cost is not a barrier for residents or businesses. There are many approaches to encouraging food waste diversion already in place in Massachusetts.

### Curbside Compost Collection by the municipality

A few towns provide curbside food scrap collection alongside trash and recycling collection so residents need not pay extra to participate in the program. Examples include [Cambridge](#), [Hamilton](#), and [Manchester](#).

### Curbside Compost Collection by a business

Many towns encourage residents to sign up for food scrap collection from a private company and some towns establish a preferred vendor agreement with one. [Medford](#) has a preferred vendor agreement with [Garbage to Gardens](#) while many towns have a similar agreement with [Black Earth Compost](#) including: [Ashland](#), [Belmont](#), [Brookline](#), [Groton](#), [Natick](#), [Newburyport](#), and [Newton](#). Other compost businesses that offer residential curbside composting include [Bootstrap Compost](#), [CERO](#)



[Cooperative](#), [City Compost](#), [City Soil](#), [Pedal People](#), [Offbeet Compost](#), and [The Compost Cooperative](#).

## Business Compost Collection by a partnership

Outside of the state, [Middletown, CT](#) is working with a composting company to provide free food scrap collection to businesses in the downtown area. Participating restaurants receive containers, education, and regular collection.

## Food scrap drop off at a municipal site

Many towns offer a place for residents to drop-off their food scraps. Towns offering drop off at their transfer stations include [Ayer](#), [Medfield](#), [Newton](#), [Northampton](#), [Wellesley](#), and many towns on the Cape. For towns that don't have transfer stations, other sites can be used including Department of Public Works facilities, recreational facilities, farmers markets, and free-standing metal containers. Examples include [Arlington](#), [Boston](#), and [Cambridge](#).



Most of these towns contract with a composting company to haul the scraps and compost them, however some towns have the ability to compost on-site. Groton has been working with Black Earth Compost which installed a building where they can efficiently compost food scraps and yard waste. Manchester plans to begin a similar project with the company soon. RecyclingWorks in MA offers [technical assistance](#) to compost sites, and Center for EcoTechnology developed a [toolkit](#) to help leaf and yard composting facilities assess if accepting food scraps would work at their site.

## Discounted backyard composting equipment

Towns can also incentivize people to compost in their backyards through offering equipment, including compost bins and kitchen scrap buckets, at a discounted price. Over 100,000 bins have already been distributed, many enabled by [grants](#) from MassDEP. Supporting at-home composting efforts with educational flyers or webpages is helpful and MassDEP provides [guidance documents](#).

## Encourage composting

To further support composting, municipalities can [encourage schools](#) to compost. The [Green Team](#) provides technical assistance and materials to schools interested in sustainability. Municipalities should prioritize [sourcing local compost](#) for city landscaping projects.

## Make a public commitment

Municipalities can show that food waste reduction is a priority by including food waste reduction strategies in the town's [Climate Action Plan](#), by making another form of public commitment, and by



leading by example at municipally-owned buildings. Towns can also hire a food waste coordinator - or add that as an important part of another staff person's responsibilities.

## For More Information

Many organizations are available to help cities and towns that are interested in reducing food waste. MassDEP's [Municipal Assistance Coordinators](#) can assist with residential programs and [RecyclingWorks in MA](#) can help identify outreach and implementation strategies for the commercial sector. Nationally, the Natural Resources Defense Council has a toolkit of [municipal strategies](#) and a [webpage](#) with additional materials and the [US Composting Council](#) has outlined other approaches.