

# Composting Case Studies

## ***Food to Flowers!***

### **San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco, CA**

#### ***History***

One of the longest running food waste diversion and composting programs is the *Food to Flowers!* program. San Francisco was one of the first cities in the nation to collect and compost food waste from residents and restaurants through their green cart program. The program was expanded to schools. In 2000, the San Francisco Unified School District began implementing the program.

#### ***Impact***

Over 100 schools are now participating in the program which diverts food waste, milk cartons and other organic waste to an offsite compost facility. Green and blue carts are placed in the cafeteria so students can compost and recycle during lunch. The schools have been able to reduce standard waste container sizes and frequency of pick up, which has helped to defray cost increases. *Food to Flowers!* uses assemblies and a standards-based curriculum to educate students about the program and the impact that environmental stewardship has on nature. The San Francisco Environment Department's award-winning school education program teaches 20,000 students annually.

#### ***Economics***

All *Food to Flowers!* schools have free access to the compost that is created from the program. Schools have been able to use this compost for their landscaping needs, eliminating the need to purchase fertilizer. Using compost results in significant savings for schools since fertilizer costs have increased dramatically in the last several years. The *Food to Flowers!* program is responsible for currently diverting about 3,300 tons of waste a year from area landfills.

To learn more about the *Food to Flowers!* Program go to: [www.sfenvironment.com/aboutus/school/](http://www.sfenvironment.com/aboutus/school/)  
You can also watch their program video on YouTube.com: *Food to Flowers! Composting & Recycling*

## ***Food to Flowers! Spreads***

### **Bellingham School District, Bellingham, WA**

Based on the success of the San Francisco *Food to Flowers!* program, Bellingham Public School District decided they also wanted to change how their lunchroom waste was managed. Adopting the *Food to Flowers!* name, the district's composting program started out with three elementary schools in January 2007.

Staff and parent volunteers in the elementary schools helped train students to place their food scraps, milk cartons and other food-related paper products in compost bins. Classroom curriculum developed specifically to reinforce the hows and whys of compost also help promote the lunchroom activity.

Today, over 11,000 students in 18 elementary, middle and high schools are currently participating in the program. This translates to over 250 tons of food/milk carton waste being diverted from the landfill annually. Though the program is virtually cost neutral, district administration has been satisfied, seeing it as a benefit to the community and sending a good message to students and staff who participate.

Other communities and school districts in the county have also adopted the program which led to the region's waste hauler, Sanitary Services Company, receiving numerous awards including The Sustainability Award from the Washington Refuse and Recycling Association.

See the link below for information on the Bellingham Schools program:  
[http://www.ssc-inc.com/recycling\\_commercial.php#flowers](http://www.ssc-inc.com/recycling_commercial.php#flowers)

## ***Food Plus and Food to Flowers!***

### **Thurston County, WA**

In May 2008, Thurston County, WA added food waste and compostable papers, including milk cartons, to their yard waste collection carts. This new program was called *Food Plus*. This co-mingled composting initiative was made possible by the recent opening of a state-of-the-art composting site, Silver Springs Organics, that facilitated the program's implementation. When the school districts in the county adopted the program, they also adopted the kid-friendly program title, *Food to Flowers*.

The county and the Washington Department of Ecology have both been instrumental in supporting the schools with site setup assistance, startup funding, staffing and changes to trash hauling pick ups. The employees of Thurston County's Solid Waste Department also assist in educating school administrators, classroom teachers, support staff and students about how they can help divert food waste and milk cartons from standard landfills. Participating schools are already diverting approximately 75% of their kitchen and cafeteria waste because of the composting program.

To learn more about the Thurston County program in schools visit:

[http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/wwm/Recycling\\_and\\_Disposal/Recycle/Food\\_Organics/Food\\_to\\_Flowers.htm](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/wwm/Recycling_and_Disposal/Recycle/Food_Organics/Food_to_Flowers.htm)

### **Plano Independent School District (PSID), Plano TX**

PISD has been operating a recycling and composting program for over 7 years. The program started out with single stream recycling (paper, aluminum cans etc.). The district has expanded its waste diversion efforts to include food waste and milk cartons. The program has achieved tremendous growth with the combined efforts from the City of Plano Environmental Services Department, the district's Operation Services Department and the PTA. The staff and students undergo a training period to learn how to divide their lunch materials for disposal. The lunchroom waste is divided into three categories: organics (food matter and paper milk cartons are co-mingled); recyclables (aluminum cans & bottles); and basic trash (items that are not recyclable or biodegradable). The PTA has been instrumental in providing volunteers to help supervise the sorting process in the lunchrooms during the start-up period. The success of the program has largely been based on this collaborative effort.

Forty-eight of the district's 66 schools (53,000 students and 7,000 employees) are now participating in the organic collections program. The district is continuing to encourage the schools to join in the organics collections program with a goal of 100% participation. The program has become increasingly user friendly and the use of biodegradable bags has made it a cleaner process for the schools. Currently more than 42% of waste is being recycled, which is saving the district a considerable amount of money - \$138,000 annually for all recyclables. In addition, the City of Plano currently picks up the organics waste from the schools at no charge, further reducing waste hauling fees. Over 1,392 cubic yards of organics were picked up last year. The City of Plano transports the organic material to the city's composting site where it is processed. The city has been operating the compost site since 1992 and sells the certified compost in bulk and bags to area businesses and residents to offset the expense of running the facility.

<http://www.plano.gov/Departments/Environmental+Services/CommercialRecycling/Organic+Recycling.htm>

### **Kennebunk-Kennebunkport School District, ME**

Five schools with over 2,500 students in Kennebunk and Kennebunkport, ME started a food waste composting program in fall 2007. Food waste, milk cartons, rice paper plates and napkins are collected in the lunchrooms and all the material is sent to Winterwood Farms, a nearby compost site. The schools saved over \$15,000 the first year in reduced garbage fees. The district facility manager says that they are diverting five cubic yards of waste each day from landfills (900 cubic yards over 180 day school year), and may double or triple the savings on garbage fees this year. The districts also received an EPA 2008 Environmental Merit Award in April for the work they have done establishing environmental efficiencies in the district's schools and at the same time reducing operating costs.