

Summary & Notes – Stevens County Organics Kickoff – Friday, October 8th 2021 @ 10AM

Friends,

Thanks to all of you who RSVP'd to the Kickoff event, whether or not you could attend. We had a great crew of folks show up learn about, discuss, ask questions about the Organics Program! Hooray!

This email serves to (1) share photos & what we chatted about at the Kickoff, (2) answer questions you had put into the RSVP form, and (3) lead you in the correct direction for future Organics Program thoughts and questions.

(1) Kickoff Notes & Thoughts

Syd- Context & History

We started off with some context about waste in Stevens County. Half of our garbage goes to a landfill in Gwinner, ND and half of it goes to the Pope/Douglas Solid Waste Management (PDSWM) Waste to Energy Facility in Alexandria, MN. We have been ready for organics recycling for a while now, as the University (composting since 2008) has partnered with the Morris Area Public Schools to compost for multiple years now. Multiple businesses and restaurants have their operations ready and set up for organics.

Because of the work by Nathan Reinbold of PDSWM, the Glacial Ridge Compost Facility (GRCF) is being built right outside of Hoffman on Highway 27. This facility is built with the intention of being regional. This means that our neighbors have invited us to bring our organics to their facility for processing.

Stevens County residents value smart resource management, creative and new ideas, and common-sense steps with environmental impacts so the county applied for a grant through the MPCA. This grant gives two years of funding (Summer 2021 -Summer 2023) to get the Organics program up and running. So that's what we are going to do!

Starting with large waste producers and following up in 2022 with smaller and household waste producers the grant is funding things like Organics carts (same as our blue recycling carts, but green), start up kits for households and businesses (bins, bags, stickers, signage), and funding a Syd to share the word around the county!

Nathan- PDSWM & GRCF

Nathan shared with us a great presentation with lots of visuals as to what the program has looked like, and currently looks like in Pope & Douglas counties. His presentation is attached in this email and is also available on the [Organics site](#) under "Resources".

Nathan talked about how the program started up with schools and now every school in the two counties is participating. He spoke on the importance of clear signage, getting the word out through community events, the technology of the Glacial Ridge facility and how they decided to pay more capital upfront to create a facility that involves less maintenance and labor in the long run. Nathan shared about community groups that volunteer as "Waste Warriors" and the Plate to Garden events that help fundraise via selling finished compost back to the community. He showed us photos of drop sites and explained how the household program works, where families purchase BPI certified bags at local businesses, collect their food waste in them, and then drop the bags off at community drop sites (fenced in areas with multiple Organics carts in them).

Finally, Nathan shared about the upcoming facility changes at PDSWM and the exciting new Recycling & Environmental Education center. Here is the video Nathan wanted to share with everyone:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfUyDwOyQ24&t=17s>

Breakout Discussions

After Nathan shared lots of good info with us, we split up into groups to ask questions and chat more about how the program can work in our community.

Household Organics- This group talked about how the household system will work, where they can purchase small BPI bags, what containers they will want to use in our kitchens, and where would make sense as a drop site. They chatted about how liquid oil is not allowed (cooking oils, grease) but that fats from meat are allowed. They chatted about where to find information about what is and isn't allowed: [Waste Warrior Disposal Guide](#) at the bottom of the PDSWM homepage. They talked about wanting to use the finished compost in our gardens and how they would want to do the [Plate to Garden](#) fundraisers. Sue also had a tip for those worried about organics smell which is to just freeze your organics until you want to dispose of them!

Commercial Organics- This group also brainstormed locations in Morris to build drop-sites. Some of their suggestions included The First Lutheran Parking Lot on California, Chizek Field, and Green River Park. They chatted about the costs for recycling and where recycling is being hauled and processed (hauled to Hutchinson, MN where they then haul it to Dem-Con in Shakopee, MN). This group had members interested in community education and large-scale community project success.

Photos!

I have created a google folder of the event photos. Feel free to add any pictures you may have taken and use these photos to show your family and friends our cool Organics Carts & signage. It is very helpful to the program to document these things (as we learned in Nathan's presentation!), so if you are willing, sharing photos would be great! I might contact you to use your photo in the future as well. If uploading them into this folder isn't working and you would still like to share them, email them my way! If you have concerns about being in any of these photos, please contact me.

Kickoff Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/YqqLe42EQrYkAYiG9>

(2) Questions & Answers

These are specific answers to the questions we received in the RSVP form. There is also a FAQ being developed on the Stevens County Organics website, so keep on the lookout for that!

1. What is organics recyclable?

- a. Any/all food scraps, paper towels, BPI certified plastics, non-recyclable soiled paper, etc. For more information on what is/isn't organics recyclable visit: co.stevens.mn.us/organics under "[What is Organics Recyclable?](#)" or the [Waste Warrior Guide](#) on the bottom of the PDSWM homepage. If you have a specific question on what is/isn't organics recyclable, email Sydney and she can find the answer and put your item up on the county website!

2. Will aged compost be available for local gardeners?

- a. Yes! After the material has completely composted and matured it will be available for local use. Community groups will be able to host [Plate To Garden](#) ([MN Composting Council](#)) events with the compost as fundraisers. Other information regarding the use of finished compost will be available once the Glacial Ridge Compost Facility is up and running.

3. How will Household Organics Collection work?

- a. Households will be invited to collect their organics in a bin of their choice at home and then bring to a community drop site for pick-up. These community drop sites have not yet been developed in Stevens County, but we are in the process of brainstorming accessible, convenient locations. Next year, Stevens County will be purchasing Household Starter Kits for people to utilize, free of charge. To learn more about the Household Organics program, visit: www.co.stevens.mn.us/1143/Household-Users

4. Will pests be a problem at community drop sites?

- a. No. As we have seen at the drop sites in Pope & Douglas counties, pests are not a problem. These drop sites are kept clean by their host sites and organics are collected on a weekly basis to ensure this does not become an issue. As with most garbage, flies may show up, but not in ways that render the drop-site unusable or unsightly.

5. What other communities are already doing organics recycling?

- a. Many communities across MN have established organics programs and compost facilities. You can visit the MPCA Compost Facility Site Locator map: www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/compost-facility-site-locator, to view where in MN there are compost facilities. This map does not showcase the programs coordinated and run in these areas but gives a general idea of where organics recycling might be available, and who to contact to find out more.

6. How much will this program cost me?

- a. Right now, nothing! The goal of the MPCA grant is to reduce the start up cost for households, businesses, and institutions as low as possible to allow us to set up an efficient, accessible program. As this is a community wide research project, and we are learning as we go, it has not yet been determined what the cost might be for organics when the grant funding is complete. In general, the Organics program is not going to drastically lower costs for garbage across Stevens County, but participating in the program allows the county to have control and choice in waste management. This is vitally important as we head into the future, where it is unlikely that garbage costs will be going down anytime soon. *Overall: participating in the Organics program diversifies Stevens County's waste management capacities, allowing us to be more resilient to increasing waste management issues and costs in the future.* With more questions or ideas on Organics program costs, contact Sydney (sydneybauer@co.stevens.mn.us).

(3) More Information

With any questions, concerns, ideas, etc. about Stevens County Organics feel free to visit the website at co.stevens.mn.us/organics. If there is information you want that is not available on the website, email Sydney (sydneybauer@co.stevens.mn.us).

Stevens County Organics: co.stevens.mn.us/organics

Pope/Douglas Solid Waste Management: www.popedouglasrecycle.com

Engbretson & Sons Disposal: www.engbretsondisposal.com

Plate To Garden: <http://www.mncompostingcouncil.org/plate-to-garden.html>

MPCA Compost Facility Locator Map: www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/compost-facility-site-locator

Nathan's Kickoff Presentation: Attached in this email

Kickoff Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/YqqLe42EQrYkAYiG9>

West-Central MN Climate Network: <https://westcentralmnclimate.network/>

Phew, if you read this far you deserve a sticker! Here is one now: ★

Feel free to forward this email on to anyone who may be interested in the program.

And, as always, with anything, ANYTHING at all, contact me via any of the methods below.

From all of the coordinators of this event, THANK YOU all for your interest in the program, we will be chatting soon!

Sydney Bauer