

THE NORTH CAROLINA COMPOST PROMOTIONAL INITIATIVE

By: Ron Alexander
R. Alexander Associates, Inc.
12121 Eastham Drive
Apex, NC 27502
Phone: 919-367-8350
Fax: 919-367-8351
Email: alexassoc@earthlink.net

The North Carolina Compost Promotional Initiative (Initiative) was developed as a means to stimulate market demand for North Carolina compost, and other recycled soil amendment type, products. The project goals were accomplished by completing a variety of statewide compost market development and educational activities which would both stimulate product demand and increase product value. Project efforts were broken down into four major areas of focus:

- Promote compost to North Carolina professional "end-users" and "specifiers"
- Promote compost to North Carolina "homeowners" and "gardeners"
- Develop a Compost Use web-page
- Coordinate efforts with the United States Composting Council's (USCC's) Promotional Initiatives

A major focal point of the project was to develop a 'Compost Use' web-page. The web-page was important because of our ability to refer both professional and non-professional end users and specifiers to it for specific technical data. Development of the Compost Use web-page was completed with funds made available through the NC DPPEA, the US EPA, as well as other regional funders. The USCC co-sponsored the development of the web-page and allowed the use of its copyrighted documents, "The Field Guide to Compost Use" and "Landscape Architects Specifications for Compost Utilization" in its development. The USCC hosts and manages the web-page on its web site (www.compostingcouncil.org). All data found within the two previously mentioned USCC technical documents had been extensively peer reviewed, and are based on a variety of university research completed throughout the United States. The Compost Use web-page will also be hyper-linked directly to the North Carolina DENR's web-site. The Compost Use web-page itself contains close to 200 pages of text and more than 50 color pictures. The Compost Use web-page provides compost use information, which is appropriate for both professional and non-professional end users, as well as companies and entities that can specify the use of compost.

The web-page itself provides information (and graphics) pertaining to:

- Benefits of compost and its effects on growing systems
- Compost feedstocks
- Compost characteristics/parameters
- Compost selection
- Comparing compost to other horticultural and agricultural products
- Compost use guidelines for various compost end uses, including:
 - Various landscape applications (planting bed establishment, mulching, planting backfill mix, topsoil blending)
 - Turf Management (turf establishment and renovation, upgrading marginal soils)
 - Nursery applications (growing media component, nursery bed and field nursery production)
 - Other (establishing vegetable crops, erosion control, silviculture, sod production)
- Landscape Architecture Specifications for Compost Utilization

A series of 'hands on' promotional and educational activities were also completed within this project to improve both compost awareness and stimulate market growth. The activities within the project (and listed below) concentrated on more conventional landscape based applications for compost, because within the State of North Carolina, landscape related (horticultural) applications currently represent the highest value compost markets. However, neither professional, nor non-professional horticultural markets have been properly engaged on a statewide basis to allow for a more long-term and sustained infrastructure to be developed. In fact, North Carolina's two largest composters sell the majority of their compost in topsoil blends. While this strategy certainly improves the marketability of their compost products, it also means that the composters are not focussing their educational efforts on promoting the benefits of 'pure' compost, which over time will more greatly benefit compost market development and improve product value. Within the projects promotional and educational efforts, compost was not only promoted as a viable horticultural and agricultural product, but also as an environmental product that promotes water quality and soil conservation.

During the early stages of the project, contact was made with various composters across the state of North Carolina (as well as the DPPEA Organic Recycling Coordinator) to develop a working group to provide feedback, and assist with specific efforts, within the project.

Specific NC CPI Project Components/Tasks

- A. Promote compost use to professional 'end users' and 'specifiers'
 1. Engage end user trade associations
 - a. Attended state trade shows to promote compost use, North Carolina programs (obtained booth) - Turfgrass Council of NC Show and the Green & Growing Trade Show (sponsored by the NC Landscape Association, NC Association of Nurserymen)

- b. Identified and educated retail/wholesale firms that sell bulk products
 - c. Developed an updated list of North Carolina 'commercial' composters
 - d. Introduced compost use information and list of composters in North Carolina to end users and conference attendees
2. Engage end user specifiers
 - a. Presented papers at 3 regional chapter meetings and the state conference of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)
 - b. Promoted compost use data/specifications to select North Carolina landscape architecture firms
 - c. Engaged the N.C. Department of Transportation regarding expanding composting usage, and new applications
 - d. Promoted compost use data/specifications to North Carolina universities teaching landscape architecture
 - e. Distributed landscape architect specs developed by USCC (computer CD) and promoted web-site to specifiers
- B. Promote compost use to 'homeowners' or 'home gardeners'
1. Focussed efforts through North Carolina members of the Garden Writers Association of America (GWAA)
 - a. Engaged specific North Carolina GWAA members
 - b. Worked with North Carolina GWAA members, and engaged the national organization (GWAA), as well as the Raleigh news media about International Compost Awareness Week
 - c. Promoted North Carolina composters and programs, USCC tools, Compost Use web-site, etc. and associated efforts
 - d. Promoted purchase of bulk product to retail/wholesale firms that sell bulk compost, wherever possible
 2. Engage Garden Clubs
 - a. Promoted North Carolina composters, compost benefits, North Carolina organics recycling initiatives, Compost Use web-site, etc.
 - b. Primarily engaged management of The Garden Clubs of North Carolina, Inc. and the National Council of State garden Clubs – providing tools and data to which they can distribute to members
 - c. Completed an article for the national organization's newsletter promoting compost use, and the end use tools available
 3. Engage Extension Service
 - a. Promoted web-page information as source for end user assistance and education

Throughout the project, major composters within the state were engaged and asked to be involved with the Initiative. As meetings and events were planned, these groups were offered the ability to provide input and, where possible and appropriate, attend. By involving the composters, they will be better prepared to promote and educate potential end users, specifiers, and compost advocates regarding the benefits of composting and compost use in the future.

The overall project objective was to stimulate demand for compost, and other recycled soil amendment type products, through a variety of educational and promotional efforts focussed

towards specific end users, specifiers and compost advocates. Through these efforts, it was a further objective to enhance the diversion of organics wastes in the State of North Carolina.

Additional project objectives were to:

- Encourage the production of greater volumes of 'quality' compost
- Improve the awareness and marketability of North Carolina produced compost
- Increase product accessibility to professional and non-professional end users in North Carolina
- Educate professional and non-professionals end user on compost use
- Improve the infrastructure for compost market development

Through enhancing market demand, the compost marketing 'pie' will grow, so individual composters will not focus on competing over who has the largest piece of the 'pie'. Instead, composters have a method to work together in a coordinated manner to stimulate overall market growth, which benefits the composting industry as a whole. Through working with project partners such as the USCC, DDPEA staff, state composters and the various North Carolina horticultural trade associations, not only were the marketing efforts in the program leveraged, and they should become more sustainable.

At the conclusion of the project, a report will be provided to the NC DENR/DPPEA that summarizes all of the activities undertaken during the Initiative, any conclusions drawn, project successes, future needs, follow-up steps, as well as lists of various types of individuals contacted.