

Let's Get Food out of the Trash!

HB 264/SB 483: Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals

The Problem with Food Waste

Food waste is a persistent problem, with over 25% of the overall food supply at the retail and consumer level going uneaten and wasted. Disposing of our organic material in landfills and incinerators contributes to climate change. Whether landfilled or burned, the waste generates methane and carbon dioxide. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas that is 86 times more potent in causing the climate to warm than carbon dioxide, and landfills contribute 17% of Maryland's methane.



HB264: The Food Waste Solution

Fortunately, this problem has a solution. Large generators of food waste produce most of the organic waste in the state; in fact, facilities that generate over 1 ton of food waste a week contribute over half of Maryland's organic waste. This means that HB264 can drastically lower our carbon emissions by requiring these facilities, such as food processors and supermarkets, to divert food waste from landfills and incinerators and instead choose one of a range of zero waste strategies: sending food waste to a compost or anaerobic digestion facility, reducing waste, donating serve-able food, managing waste in a system installed onsite, or diverting food waste for agricultural purposes.

We can realize these environmental benefits with minimal economic impact – HB264 phases in to apply to facilities that produce more than two, then one, tons of food waste per week, only applies if the facility has access to a nearby organics recycling facility, and allows these facilities flexibility to choose from a range of options. Furthermore, the law will create business opportunities for local entrepreneurs to respond to the need for zero waste options.

What the Bill Does

- 1** Requires places that throw out 2-tons of organic waste a week to source-separate food residuals if an organics recycling facility exists that has the capacity and is willing to accept food residuals within a 30-mile radius
- 2** Gives facilities flexibility for disposing of waste. Instead of, or in addition to, sending food residuals to organics recycling facilities, places may: reduce waste, donate servable food, manage residuals in a system installed onsite, or divert food waste for agricultural purposes (like animal feed).
- 3** Allows for waste generators to receive a waiver if the cost of recycling waste is not competitive with the cost of disposing waste using other methods.
- 4** Directs the Maryland Department of the Environment, Department of General Services and Department of Natural Resources to identify locations on State properties that are suitable for organics recycling facilities.
- 5** Directs the Maryland Department of Commerce to make recommendations for financial and other incentives to encourage food waste reduction and composting in the State.

HB264 helps more than just the climate. Compost improves our soil health. When added to soil, compost adds carbon and can reduce urban stormwater pollutants by 60 to 95%. Soil health has been in decline, in part due to our broken food system. We extract nutrients when we grow plants in soil, but rarely return those nutrients to the soil. Adding compost replenishes the soil microbiome and improves soil health. HB264 also addresses hunger in our community. Approximately twice as many Marylanders are food insecure this year than last year. When similar legislation passed in Vermont, food donation increased by at least 30%, taking usable food and getting it into the hands of food banks and hungry people.