



The City of Troy's USDA Compost Program: *From the Ground Up*

End of Pilot Report
Autumn 2023





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In 2021, two weeks after I started working for the City of Troy, I wrote the grant application for a two-year curbside composting pilot program. To my wonderment, we got it!

Our ultimate goal was to make food scrap diversion as accessible as possible, removing any potential barrier for folks to participate. Throughout these two years, we've seen the impact that 250 households can make by separating their food scraps from household garbage. Thanks to you, we've diverted over 81,000 pounds of food scraps from the landfill—that's an average of 2 tons of avoided carbon emissions! All while creating valuable finished compost that has come back to our community and helped gardens and green spaces throughout our City.

This pilot program, funded through the United States Department of Agriculture and the National Resource Conservation Service, will be concluding in late September of this year. We've applied for two other federal funding opportunities to offer a new composting program with more comprehensive services and increased participation capacity. Please keep a look out for updates on the City of Troy website at www.troyny.gov.

To help you continue to divert your food scraps, we are expanding our food scrap drop-off service at the Troy Resource Management Facility, which is open to residents on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 1PM. Since your five-gallon bucket is branded with the pilot program logo, please feel free to continue using it to bring your food scraps to the Resource Management Facility as we continue working toward offering an expanded program!

It's been my sincere pleasure to create and execute this program. Thank you for making it the best it could be, and we hope to follow this program with an even better program soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Naomi Pitkin".

Naomi Pitkin

Recycling Specialist



INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

This program was administered in partnership with local food scrap hauler FoodScraps360 and the Town of Bethlehem for a curbside food scrap collection service. The USDA awarded the City of Troy funding towards *From the Ground Up: An Environmental Stewardship Initiative*, which started on September 29th, 2021.

Registrations began immediately thereafter, and within the first three days of opening registrations, nearly all 250 spots were filled. As the phases progressed, more residents added their information to the program's wait list. All costs associated with the program were covered for residents, and the 75% match funding from USDA made the pilot program financially viable for the City of Troy.

Program objectives included increasing resident access to finished compost, decreasing municipal food waste, and diverting food scraps from the landfill. Other City objectives included a communications strategy to inform

participating households on all topics related to composting. In addition, the City wanted to increase data collection for the Recycling and Resource Management Department.

The program was divided into three phases. Phase one was six months, and included 75 households. Phase two was also six months (adding an additional 50 households) bringing the total to 125. The longest phase was the third, which was one year (with an additional 125 households) for a total of 250.

Monthly data reports were a requirement for collaboration between the city of Troy, the town of Bethlehem, and FoodScraps360. The Recycling and Resource Management Department also administered regular surveys to mark participant progress through the program. Questions included demographic information, comfort level with content covered, additional supplies requested for experience, and an anonymous space for questions, comments, and concerns.



PHASE 1

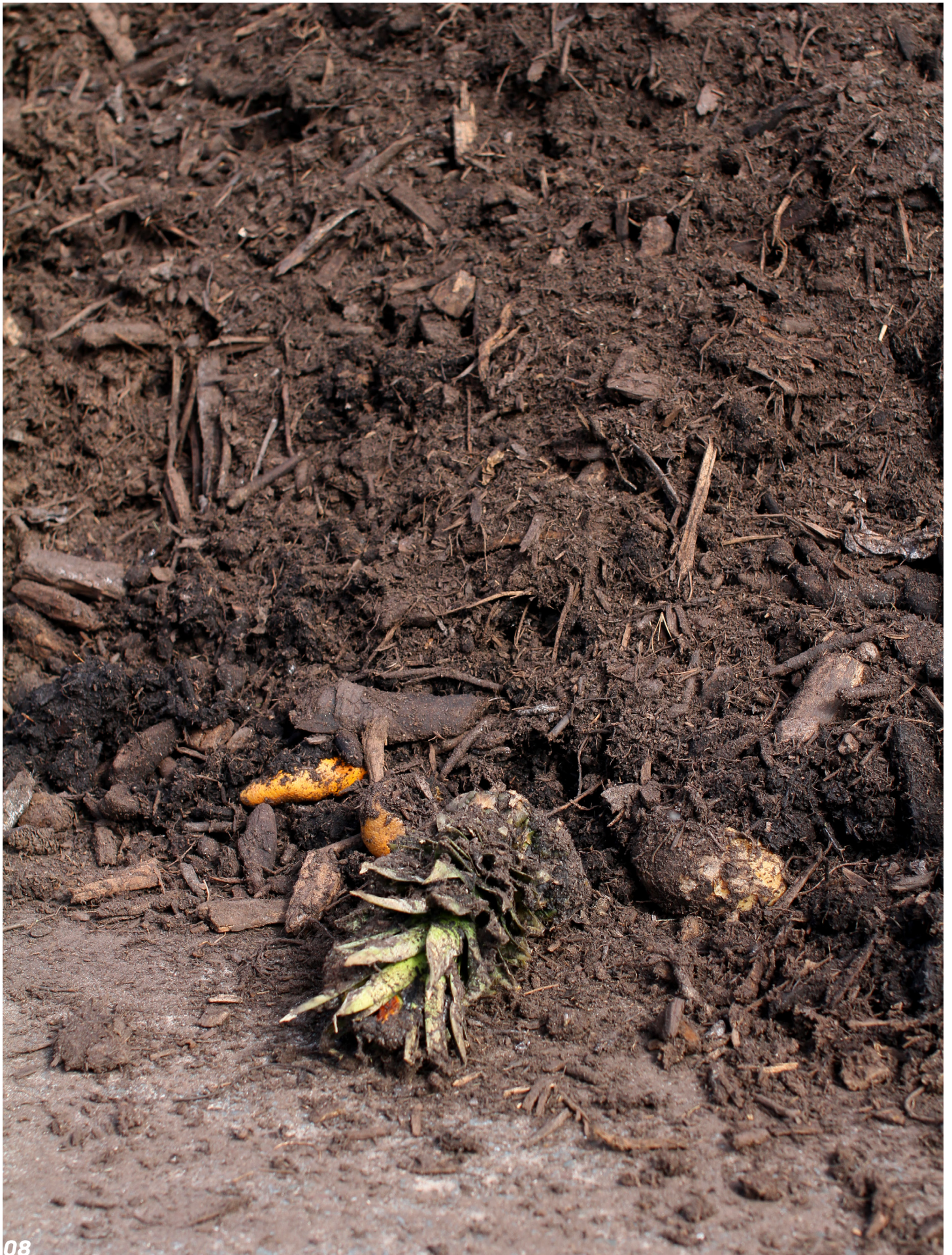
Phase One had several notable accomplishments, including minimal contamination levels (<1%) and low participant attrition (only three households dropped out of the program.)

In the first six months of the program, 26,700 pounds of food scraps were diverted. Additionally, the survey administered by the City at the end of phase one had a remarkable 60% response rate (45 participants) and the collected impressions were very positive.

The City successfully overcame several challenges during Phase One. The City and FoodScraps360 offered the needs-based option for a household to have two buckets

should their single five-gallon bucket not provide enough space for the food scraps. 40 households selected this option, however, this decreased to 28 households after communicating that this was need-based and would preserve as much grant funding as possible for future phases.

During the first Phase of the program, FoodScraps360 offered all customers one complementary 40-pound bag of compost annually. This soil-building feature of their regular business model was appealing to the City Administration as a part of this program. 17 households placed orders for finished compost.



PHASE 2

Phase Two had several notable accomplishments, including no issues with contamination, and 17,000 pounds of food scraps diverted from the landfill. Despite the increase in participating households, we attribute the differential in food scrap weight diverted with the holiday season generating much more materials in Phase One than Two.

In response to the Phase Two end-of-phase survey, almost 75% of respondents were extremely satisfied with the pilot program. Nine households placed orders for a total of 16 bags of finished compost. Based on the demand in the first phase, the finished compost bags were decreased to 20 pounds during Phase Two.

Challenges included inactive households/inactive participants, equitable representation

of districts citywide, and replacement buckets. In this Phase, nine households dropped out of the program due to relocation. Twelve households that had limited or zero successful pickups were contacted to resolve their lack of participation or be removed from the program and replaced by a household from the waitlist.

The last challenge during Phase Two was managing replacement buckets and lids. Households were experiencing unwanted attention from local critters toward their five-gallon buckets. In June and August of 2022, there were five orders for replacement buckets and/or lids. While this is a low number in comparison to the total number of participating households, the City monitored the requests for replacements to ensure grant funding would be utilized to the fullest.



PHASE 3

Mentioned in the previous annual report, the City of Troy anticipated potential challenges with the roll-out of Phase Three, maintaining low contamination levels, outreach for additional households, and program close-out. Phase Three began in November of 2022 and concluded at the end of the period of performance: September 29, 2023. The total amount of food scraps diverted in this phase was 60,781 pounds. 15 households dropped out of the program, but were promptly replaced with names from the waitlist. The City was pleased to see that there was interest from additional households in participating in the program. This will inform participation in future iterations of From the Ground Up.

Regarding the program roll-out, one consistent logistical consideration was the addition of new households to the routes. In phase three, the number of participant households increased from 125 to 250. This nearly doubled the vendor's existing customer base, and actually doubled the City's number of participating households. The solution for adding the 125 additional households was to create new, more efficient routes with both existing and new participants. Existing

participants were notified of their service date change via mailed letter and email. The new routes were implemented with no difficulties.

While the City was anticipating some challenges in outreach for additional households for the third phase, the program's wait list stayed at a consistent level for replacement households. In order to maintain the level of participation in the third phase, the Recycling and Resource Management Department posted semi-frequent social media graphics and put up flyers at City Hall to promote the program. Additionally, the City received communications from interested participants who had seen the eye-catching food scrap collection buckets around their neighborhoods. This happened a fair amount during Phase 3, as it was the largest participant pool in the program.

To close out the program, the City knew it would need to notify participants in advance that the pilot was concluding. Participants were sent a letter detailing close-out protocol and next steps. The letter was also sent electronically to increase reception.



The vendor notified participants that should they choose to, they could continue diverting their food scraps curbside with a paid subscription. For those who do not have the financial capacity, the City of Troy expanded its food scrap drop off at the Troy Resource Management Facility, open to residents on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The City of Troy and food scrap hauler both feel From the Ground Up was a successful program that provided crucial information regarding residents' interest and investment in food scrap diversion, and the financial and programmatic logistics required for a citywide

program. The Recycling and Resource Management department applied for two federal funding opportunities in the hopes of being selected. Through the implementation of this program, the City determined that a more financially efficient model would be moving from a curbside model to a drop-off. In this new iteration, slots will be reserved.

The Recycling and Resource Management Department will continue advocating for a citywide food scrap diversion program.





CONCLUSION

Thanks to this program, 101,085 pounds of food scraps diverted from the landfill. That's 50.5 tons — the weight of approximately 33 Volkswagen Beetles —that was instead used to create nutrient-rich compost and support our neighbors' ability to grow their own food.

The City of Troy Recycling and Resource Management Department has researched and applied for additional funding opportunities in pursuit of a potential future iteration of this program.

Our goal will be to offer a program with

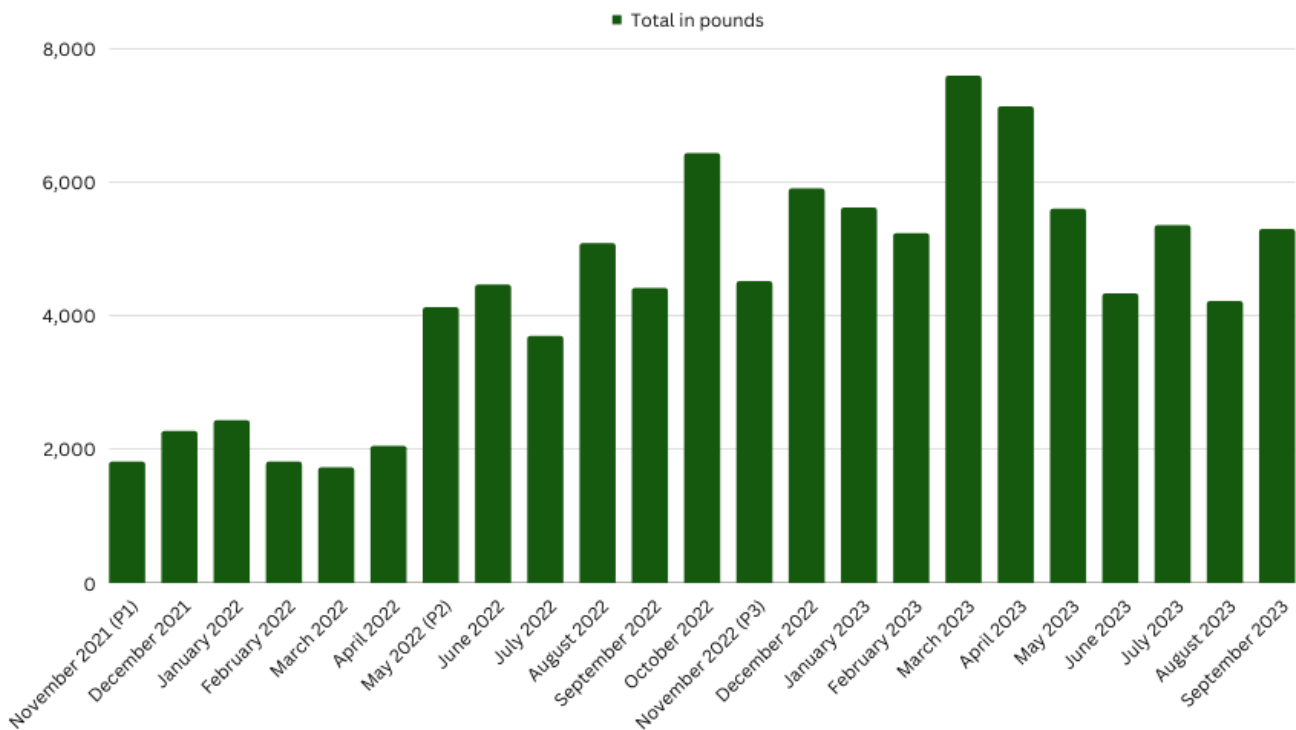
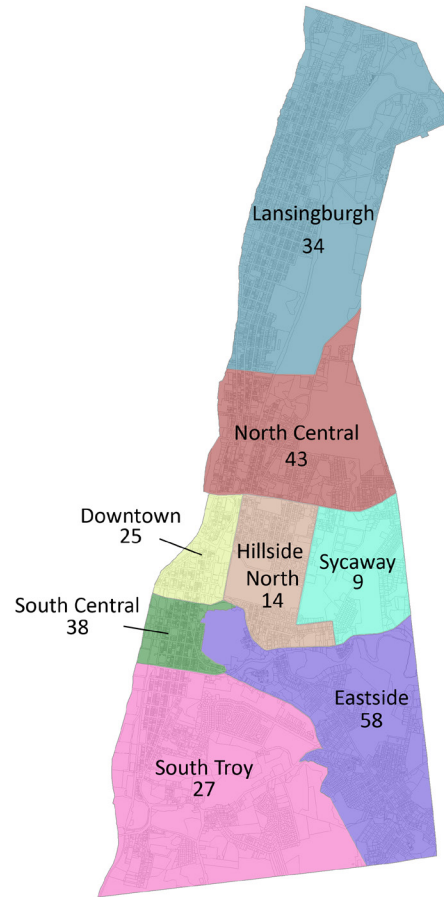
expanded opportunities to participate and greater demonstrated benefits for the City of Troy. The City is currently evaluating strategies to minimize costs so the future program is both economically and environmentally sustainable.

In the interim, the City is expanding its food scrap drop-off service at the Troy Resource Management Facility, open to residents on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 1PM, to provide a pathway for food scrap diversion as other opportunities are reviewed.

Participating Households by Neighborhood

Households participated in every neighborhood across the City of Troy.

This program prevented thousands of pounds of emissions. Food scraps that would have gone to the landfill were recycled into finished compost, or “black gold.”



DATA

Monthly Weight (in Pounds) of Food Scraps Diverted from Landfill

Phase 1:

November 2021:	1,813
December 2021:	2,273
January 2022:	2,433
February 2022:	1,810
March 2022:	1,727
April 2022:	2,047

Phase 2:

May 2022:	4,122
June 2022:	4,460
July 2022:	3,692
August 2022:	5,084
September 2022:	4,412
October 2022:	6,431

Phase 3:

November 2022:	4,512
December 2022:	5,902
January 2023:	5,617
February 2023:	5,233
March 2023:	7,589
April 2023:	7,132
May 2023:	5,597
June 2023:	4,284

