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Gilford piloting compost program to reduce food waste

Among 5 Lakes Region towns taking part in effort with Lakes Region Planning Commission

By BOB MARTIN, The Laconia Daily Sun

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GILFORD — Public Works Director Meghan Theriault knows food waste can be a massive part of the town's solid waste. In an effort to reduce it, her team is leading a portion of two pilot composting programs, in conjunction with the Lakes Region Planning Commission.

At-home program

Gilford is one of five Lakes Region towns in the regional food waste pilot, which also includes Ashland, Bristol, Moultonborough and Wolfeboro. Each town will have 32 Jora brand tumblers allotted to them for participating residents to take home. The residents will first participate in a two-hour, in-person training session, and complete surveys for data-collecting purposes. The program is free for participants, who are able to keep the tumblers.

According to Environmental Planner Matt Rose of LRPC, the pilot will begin in the spring following the training sessions, and there will be a total of four surveys ending in August.

Rose said the program was made possible when LRPC was awarded a USDA Composting and Food Waste Reduction grant of \$87,300, to launch what is the region's inaugural Food Waste Composting Pilot Program.

The funds not only provide the means for the at-home program offered to the five Lakes Region communities, but also to develop two, large-scale food waste composting sites, in Gilford and Wolfeboro.

“This is very much geared toward training residents in how to compost food waste at home,” Rose said. “There will be data collection for the grantor and us to learn more.”

Therault said she has been trying to get the hype going about the program, and has already received plenty of interest through social media posts. She is planning to select participants through a lottery system.

The training sessions will involve how to assemble the compost bin, fundamentals of composting food waste, tips on how to be successful, and information about data collection.

“We are trying to give people the tools and training, so they can be successful at home,” Rose said.

Rose said when it comes to transfer stations and solid waste in general, the Granite State has a goal of reducing its waste stream, essentially reducing the amount of trash going into a dumpster. This not only helps the environment, but also saves money, as this is trash transfer stations won't need to haul.

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— *Environmental Planner Matt Rose of Lakes Region Planning Commission*

“It’s a waste diversion technique,” Rose said. “Also, having a usable compost at home is healthier than chemical fertilizers.”

Rose said the ability to collect data through the program is a key aspect of the grant. He said when compostable waste goes into landfills, it doesn't properly break down, and can lead to greenhouse gas. This, he said, could be a valuable measurement of greenhouse gas production.

He also said compost has good soil retention properties; it's good for growing crops by keeping plants hydrated. It can all be done using food scraps.

While in the state it is legal to compost meat and dairy, this program will solely focus on composting plant matter, as it is simpler and leads to less “critter vandalism.”

Compostable materials are categorized as “green” and “brown.” “Green” materials are fruits, vegetables, scraps and peels, nuts and shells of nuts, eggshells, coffee grounds, tea bags, bread, pasta, rice and beans.

“This is the stuff coming out of the kitchen that you want to compost,” Rose said. “It has a lot of moisture.”

But “brown” materials are also needed to make the compost by absorbing the moisture, and include wood shavings, sawdust, leaves, garden trimmings, livestock bedding, straw, hay, napkins, and shredded paper.

All of these materials can be used in the tumblers provided to program participants. Rose said the tumblers provide more organization, instead of making a pile on the ground. He spoke to the communities about concerns they may have ahead of getting the tumblers, for things like critters, and he said they will be lockable and made of metal. They will also be insulated not to freeze, and control odor.

Rose said last year, he went to the transfer stations of participating communities to talk with residents about interest. Some people provided contact information, so they have somewhere to start. Tumblers are limited to 32, but Rose said people can still attend the training for information purposes.

Training sessions are scheduled as follows:

- Bristol: 5-7 p.m., Thursday, April 23, at Bristol Historic Town Hall, 45 Summer St.
- Gilford: 6-8 p.m., Thursday, May 7, at the Gilford Town Hall Conference Room, 47 Cherry Valley Road
- Ashland: 6-8 p.m., Tuesday, May 12, at the Town Conference Room, 6 Collins St.
- Moultonborough: 5:30-7:30 p.m., Thursday, May 21, at Moultonborough Public Library, 4 Holland St.
- Wolfeboro: 5-7 p.m., Thursday, May 28, at Wolfeboro Town Hall, 84 S. Main St.

Onsite program

The grant also includes support at Gilford and Wolfeboro transfer stations for onsite composting. Theriault said she and her staff will be trained on June 8, when staff from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services will be there to teach about permit requirements.

Rose said each year, a solid waste operator needs to acquire 2.5 hours of solid waste training to re-certify for licensing, and this will satisfy that. The training will go over setting up a composting site and its operations at the transfer station.

Rose said when he has talked to residents, there are a lot of people interested in composting, but don't have the means to do so because they live in apartments, condominiums or somewhere else that doesn't allow for it. The onsite program makes it possible for any resident to bring compostable materials to the transfer station.

"It allows for residents to separate food waste, bring it to the transfer station where they will compost it for you," Rose said.

Theriacult is excited about the program, and said maybe down the line they can phase in mandatory separation.

"I have wanted to reduce the municipal solid waste weight, and aside from removing heavy things like glass, this is the best way to do that," Theriacult said.

Upon a successful completion of the pilot, LRPC will continue to seek avenues to expand the program.

"This is our starting point, but the goal of the LRPC is to expand on this once we see the success of this pilot program," Rose said.

For more information, visit lakesrpc.nh.gov/food-waste-composting-pilot-program.