

Composting succeeds in Bridgewater

BY TAYLOR RAPALYEA

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

BRIDGEWATER — Over 54 weeks, Bridgewater's pilot curbside composting program collected 22.5 tons of material from 147 participants. The program, which was created by Housatonic Resource Recovery Authority Director Jen Iannucci, is the first of its kind in the state.

Iannucci, a Bridgewater resident, said she got the idea after a meeting with the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to talk about waste management.

"I was scratching my head over why so much of the conversation was about singlestream recycling," Iannucci said. "Thirty-two percent of our waste stream is organic material."

She said she developed a plan to catch the See **COMPOSTING** , Page **5B**



An All American Waste hauler picks up compost in Bridgewater as part of the town's pilot curbside composting program, orchestrated through the Housatonic Resource Recovery Authority.

CONTRIBUTED

Article Continued Below

[See COMPOSTING on Page B05](#)

COMPOSTING: Pilot program off to good start

Continued from 1B

"low-hanghead over why so much of the conversation was about single-stream recycling," Iannucci said. "Thirty two percent of our waste stream is organic material."

She said she developed a plan to catch the "low-hanging fruit" of waste diversion, and the program kicked off in the first week of April 2014.

Although HRRRA is based in Brookfield, Bridgewater's small size — its population was 1,704 in 2012, according to the Connecticut Economic Resource Council — and use of one dominant waste hauler made it the ideal candidate

for a pilot program. All American Waste services more than 90 percent of the town.

New Milford Farms, in the neighboring town of New Milford, waived its compost processing fee for the pilot year, and All American Waste, which has headquarters in New Milford, agreed to transport the organic waste at no cost to the residents.

All American Waste provided the small, black outdoor compost bins that participants place on the curbside Fridays before 6 a.m. HERRA bought the smaller containers for indoors and the compostable bags.

Iannucci said it was a conscious decision to make the program voluntary because it improved the contamination rates. Contamination in compost is inorganic materials that cannot be processed, such as produce stickers, rubber bands or twist ties.

"The contamination rate is nearly zero," Iannucci said.

On April 18 at the Bridgewater town garage, the HERRA held an event to collect the compost at the end of the pilot year. The HERRA bought the compost and then donated it to people as a way of rewarding them for participating.

She said the program has been so successful that Ridgefield and New Fairfield are looking to implement a similar one.

Iannucci already had her own backyard composting system at her home in Bridgewater, but she said she became a program participant to experience firsthand how it worked for residents.

Using the compost, her family grows tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, lettuce, peppers, and cantaloupe, as well as flowers and herbs, she said.

"They're awesome," she said, when asked how her tomatoes fared with the compost. "We have a pretty good garden."

Though Iannucci got plenty of positive feedback from the program, she acknowledged one participant dropped out of the program when the compost attracted maggots and flies.

"We encouraged people not to give up," she said. "We just continued to try and educate them to prevent it from happening."

Iannucci said she advised participants to keep their outdoor bins in a cool dry place to avoid creating odors that attract bugs. She also heard residents were having some trouble with raccoons, and told them to secure their outdoor bins with bungee cord.

"They'll roll the bins around the yard, but they couldn't get into it with the cord," Iannucci said.

Iannucci said the program will be implemented permanently, and it appears it will remain free, but she expressed concerns about how to convince more residents to participate.

"One of the things that I always ask is, 'Do you ever ask yourself why we're burning our food?'" she said. "The best alternative is resource recovery, so take food as a resource, recover it from the waste and convert it to compost."



Participants in Bridgewater's pilot curbside compost program received this kit after signing up. On the left is the outdoor composting bin, which holds about 8 gallons of organic composting material. Participants were instructed to put the larger bin on the curb before 6 a.m. every Friday. On the right is the smaller container participants received, along with compostable bags, to collect compost indoors.

CONTRIBUTED

Powered by **TECNAVIA**

Copyright (c) 2015 Republican-American 04/25/2015