# Food Scrap Collection Recap and Recommendations

I personally have been involved it the NWSWD food scrap collection programs since day 1. From collecting the first totes with a pick-up truck for our first participant (BFA St. Albans) to today’s 5 day a week collection operation I am very proud of what it has become. For most of the past 12 years of operation the NWSWD was the only food scrap hauler in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. In the past three year we have seen growth in this area and other haulers have started to perform this task. We have remained competitive because our prices are low, we provide exceptional service, and we keep our operations local. I believe that some haulers have been able to bundle services (trash, recycling, food scrap) or signed large state/regional contracts.

At previous meetings I have outlined our current operations of food scrap collection. I have included some key data here for reference. This data reinforces some key points of our program.

* The hauling is more efficient than we believed, but there are still many miles driven.
* We divert a significant tonnage of food scraps each year.
* The food scrap collection program currently loses money. Now many of the programs that the NWSWD run are subsidized by grants from the state and our District surcharge. Administrative costs and infrastructure that manage, handle, or support all or most of our programs are difficult to divide out accurately to a single program. But it is clear that currently, our prices are low.

Even if we raise prices our per tote collection cost structure could keep us favorable over other haulers who will charge flat fees for service. However, I believe that over time our value and niche in the market will erode and accounts will be picked off one by one until we are left with scraps. I believe we could overcome this with focused growth and dedication to providing this service. However, we are not a waste hauler, and we are at a point where in order to continue to operate we would need to spin off a separate operation/department to manage the food scrap collections and make significant investments in equipment and labor.

Any growth beyond a handful of accounts would necessitate two things:

1. Staff- our current crew works ~40 hours per week. More staff would be needed to operate beyond our current levels. One employee part time to operate the food scrap collection to begin with more moving forward. Administrative assistance for billing/admin/oversite to begin with.
2. Equipment investments- We will need to replace one of our trucks in the next year or two at the very least. This vehicle is crucial to the food scrap collection program. If we expand food scrap collection, we will not only need staff but additional equipment and vehicles. Possibly equipment to make collection more efficient.

Even with no growth we are finding that operating at our current levels are proving stressful to our current operations. The key drawback of our collection operation is, engaging in an endeavor where we are responsible to hundreds of customers, spread out across two counties, on a fixed schedule, every day of the week, any disruption is a minor emergency. Truck problems need to be solved immediately or a rental needs to be secured. If staff members are absent from work, they must be replaced by someone, either administrative staff or someone from another program. This past year we have found ourselves “robbing Peter to pay Paul” two to three time a month just to meet our obligations to our customers.

All of this is a long explanation for the following: I love our food scrap collection program. We have collected thousands of tons of food and provided it to a farmer to make high quality soil with. We have helped our residents and businesses with a system to manage their food waste in this closed loop and removed that waste from the landfill. However now is the time for the NWSWD to step away from the operation of hauling food scraps for others. When we started the program if we did not provide the service no one else would but, now there are others who can provide this service. The NWSWD could benefit from the sale of our program and give a hauler the accounts and equipment necessary to jump into this sector.

I propose that we accept bids for the commercial and residential food scrap collection programs separately. There are companies that operate in and around our service area and would be positioned to operate either/both and some that would only have interest in one or the other:

Commercial only: Casella, Myers, Gauthier’s, Grow Compost, Sylvester’s, Weatherby’s

Residential only: No Waste, I’m Diggin’ It,

Possibly both: Duffy’s

????: 802 Compost Services, Some Dude’s Compost, Doug’s Compost Pickup, Roots Compost, Earthgirl Composting, Tuttle’s

The system and infrastructure are in place so the District can step back, and it will still function. This move will allow the NWSWD to focus on other programs and initiatives that no one currently has. Agricultural plastic recycling. Consistent, safe, and convenient HHW collection. Improving drop-off sites. These initiatives will allow the NWSWD to divert more waste for our region and make our waste stream less toxic.

The NWSWD will continue to have a robust compost program. Backyard compost education. Drop-off points. Growth of small composters. Education and outreach to business generators. These aspects will be able to grow and flourish when most of our efforts are not taken up by day-to-day operations of food scrap collection.

I look forward to discussing next steps and hearing any feedback that you have.