



Climate Smart Task Force Organics Management Plan

Town of New Lebanon, NY

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Background

This plan reflects past, current and future strategies for the town of New Lebanon to maintain and expand the management of organic materials. New Lebanon defines sustainable food management as minimizing the environmental impact of food waste by individuals, community, and businesses through diversion from the waste stream.

New Lebanon is primarily a rural town with trailer parks, single family homes and farms. Several family farms sell produce both locally and regionally. In its small downtown area, New Lebanon has an increasing number of coffee shops, bars and restaurants. A large community garden sits next to the Catholic Church.

Conversations about the possibility of providing access to composting for all New Lebanites began with the Climate Smart Committee Task Force in 2020. Many people have wooded areas attached to their living space, and engage in some form of composting at home, but those living in or near downtown or in one of several hamlets or trailer parks do not have that access. The increasing awareness of the impact of food waste and the desire to implement programs to curb it led to several pilot initiatives that are described below, many of which are still in process.

In 2022 and 2023 CSC members from the education committee attended a number of workshops on the composting process itself. These workshops were primarily hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension or ILSR – The Institute for Local Self-Reliance - which hosted a 5-part series over several months on different composting options and the science behind them. Continuously learning new methods and information about composting and establishing relationships with centers for resources is a serious motivation for CSC members interested in supporting community food waste initiatives. Members of the CSC will continue to use education opportunities provided by ILSR as a resource.

In the Fall of 2022, CSC members Kris Cottom and Cathy Wilkerson attended a two-part workshop series designed to help towns, villages, municipal and county waste departments and other interested government entities to develop program descriptions suitable for grant applications and/or government support. As a result of those two workshops, we came up with a draft for a Sustainable Food Management program for New Lebanon which was later modified with assistance from a Masters Student from Cornell University, to create this plan.

Vision

Build community and connections through services to reduce food waste with the goal of engaging residents, businesses and consumers, farmers and other food producers in sustainable food management.

Goals of the CSC Compost Effort

- 1) To investigate possibilities and actively divert food scraps from the landfill,
- 2) to establish a town compost program in collaboration with CSC volunteers and,
- 3) to educate the community about food scrap diversion.

Scope

Includes

- All of New Lebanon as defined by voting districts.
- Businesses and institutions that provide meals such as restaurants, schools, grocery/deli, and temporary large scale food delivery events (e.g., town picnics).
- Farmers and food producers.
- Residents of New Lebanon, regardless of full vs. part-time status.

Excludes

- Food providers whose primary address is outside of New Lebanon.

Community Engagement

New Lebanon has a strong history of volunteers who help to make projects a reality. Based on past experiences and current programs, these strategies will be used to facilitate community engagement, participation and education about organic waste.

- **Workshops and Seminars:** Attend and host workshops in collaboration with community partners.
- **Social Media and Online Tools:** Regularly share information about composting and opportunities to engage with the program to the community through social media, emails and other appropriate online platforms. Use these platforms to distribute surveys to collect feedback from the community.
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Develop efforts to recruit volunteers, emphasizing the role they play in the program's success and providing training for effective engagement in collection and outreach efforts.
- **Partnership Development:** Forge collaborations with local businesses, restaurants, and organizations, encouraging their active participation by showcasing the benefits of diverting food waste and offering them opportunities for community involvement.
- **Community Events:** Organize engaging events centered around sustainable living, incorporating activities that demonstrate the ease and impact of composting, attracting diverse community members.
- **Vulnerable communities:** Identify New Lebanon's vulnerable populations and forge relationships to make composting accessible to all.
- **School Programming:** Engage interested teachers in working with the CSC to develop age-appropriate educational materials and activities addressing food sustainability.

Source material (books, videos, etc.) for different age groups would be identified for acquisition by the school libraries and/or public library. Activities could include: Elementary and High School poster contests or science fair projects. School gardening and composting projects. Oral history projects focusing on food preservation techniques, the area's Shaker heritage, or individual family activities.

Team and Supporting Partners

- **Program Leads:** Kris Cottom & Cathy Wilkerson
- **CSC volunteers:** Liz Poreba, Bruce Shenker
- **Community Partners:** New Lebanon Farmers Market, New Lebanon Community Garden, Columbia County Solid Waste, Columbia County Cooperative Extension, Church of the Immaculate Conception, local farmers
- **Commercial Partners:** Tilden Plaza Mall Vendors (Maverick's, Stewart's, Blueberry Hill Market Cafe)

Organics Management Strategies

Community Food Scrap Diversion

Food Scrap Pick Up

The Climate Smart Task Force initiated a pilot food scrap diversion program (as approved by the Town Board) in the spring of 2021. This pilot engaged multiple volunteers and businesses in collecting coffee grounds for composting. The pilot was expanded in 2022 to include food scrap collection at the New Lebanon Farmers Market store. This project involves:

1. The distribution of approximately 5-gallon buckets for food scrap collection.
2. Designating individuals to collect the buckets for diversion to the Columbia County Digester. The Digester will be producing compost for distribution throughout the county. In November 2023 the county provided New Lebanon with its first 5-gallon bucket of finished soil amendments, ready to be mixed with other compost and fertilizers for garden or woodland use, from the county program.
3. Provide food scrap receptacles at all Town functions.
4. Capturing data on the volume of food scraps diverted from the landfill.
 - a. Data is collected by weighing the buckets and subtracting the empty bucket weight. Data is stored in a shared document and then daily intakes are averaged after every two weeks.
5. Publicize and educate about the county digester and about the local Community Garden compost piles.

Expansion goal: Individual Food Scrap Pick Up

By 2025, the goal is to expand this program to include individual households using the same principles as the community collection approach. Including drop off locations, distribution of buckets, designated pick up times and continued community education and engagement. Until enough volunteers and/or funding is secured to have a designated person in charge of collection, this program will remain in development.

Community Garden

Maintain a relationship with Community Garden and Peter Morrill, to expand access to the garden to make the compost piles available to the town. The CSC will publicize the community garden compost pile by providing informational leaflets at tabling events and buckets to residents. Finished compost at the garden will be available to garden users. Partner with restaurants to bring coffee grounds to the garden pile.

Trailer Park Compost Program

In the winter of 2022 the compost committee designed and distributed a survey to one of the local trailer parks to gauge residents' interest in establishing a composting program. There was significant interest from residents to participate. The program consisted of distributing 5 gallon buckets to residents and having a designated task force member to collect and transport the bins to the county digester. A trial program was launched in the Spring of 2023 and after a few months it ended due to buckets going missing. The compost team learned a lot from this experience and hopes to establish a community composting program for the trailer parks with an emphasis on educating residents about composting to better encourage participation.

Food Redistribution

Community Cooler

In 2022, New Lebanon acquired, through a grant obtained by Josh Young and the New Lebanon permanent Farmers Market, a Community Cooler located in Maverick's. The Community Cooler is intended to divert unsold but saleable food from the Market store and make it available, for free, to anyone in New Lebanon regardless of income or residency status. Additionally, New Lebanon residents have been encouraged to make their own contributions following the model of the "free little libraries" - a "give one, take one" approach. Diverting unsold, saleable food and encouraging citizen participation in food redistribution addresses two critical issues:

1. Potential climate impact of food if it were to become part of the waste stream, and
2. Food insecurity in a rural community in a community which could be classified as a "food desert".

The Market store and Maverick's have been exclusively responsible for the management of the Community Cooler. Individuals have provided additional support by funding food purchased for the Community Cooler. This project is a valuable, although separate, effort promoting

sustainable food management. Both the Market store and Maverick's are key stakeholders in our project and we will support and respect this existing independent effort.

Local Food Shelf

The Catholic Church operates a food shelf, Charlie's Pantry. Food pantries can be a participant in diverting food from the waste stream. While there are no immediate plans to officially engage Charlie's Pantry in any effort or project. They remain a possible food waste solution to consider for the future.

Feed Animals

Connect with local livestock farmers who can use food scraps to feed animals. CSC food scrap volunteers coordinate with farmers to collect and distribute food scrap at regular intervals as needed. Scraps are collected from the permanent Farmers Market and future outdoor events. In the future, this program may be expanded to include pick up from restaurants and businesses.

Funding and Program Support

Most efforts by the CSC are the result of volunteer hours. Recruiting, retaining and supporting volunteers is a crucial component of the success of this plan. The CSC task force is interested in pursuing private and public grants and town support in an effort to fund projects that require capital investments.

Implementation Timeline (see page 7)

Lessons Learned

- The on-going collection of food scraps from a restaurant, a food prep group, and the year-round Farmers Market have been successful and sustainable by the small core of volunteers from the CSC task force. We have been picking up about 80 pounds a week from Mavericks and taking it to the county pick-up in Chatham. Mark Turner has been picking up an average of 145 pounds per week to feed to his pigs. However, we do not have the volunteer capacity to expand to other restaurants in town who need more support and guidance.
- Many people in town support the idea of composting. Those with access to yards with compost bins or woods for compost piles are already keeping their non-meat and dairy food scraps out of the landfills. Many other residents feed much of their food scraps to pets, mostly dogs.
- Only a few residents currently bring their food scraps to the community garden. Even when we had a bucket for public food scraps outside the Farmers Market, only 1 or 2 families participated.
- Our desire to expand the compost collection to residents have not been successful because we do not have the volunteer hours to engage in the one-on-one education and support work necessary to get it up and running. We are currently negotiating with the county to allow New Lebanon volunteers to offer a food scrap collection bucket at the New Lebanon site of Saturday morning recycling pick-up. New Lebanon volunteers would provide the bucket and pick it up at the end of the session each week, adding any food scraps to the existing stream to the digester.

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Implementation Timeline

2025

- Continue to distribute and provide educational opportunities for composting to individuals and community groups
- Secure grant funding to cover expenses for buckets and driving to digester
- Evaluate existing programs for improvement
- Continue with weekly pick-ups
- Recruit one new team food scrap team member
- Launch individual food scrap diversion

2024

- Reestablish outdoor farmers education
- Attend at least one composting education event through CCE
- Host at least one engagement event with youth on composting
- Designate task force members to research and explore grant funding
- Develop and distribute educational materials for home composting
- Initiate new drop-off sites at Community Center and Saturday recycling site for residential food scraps.

2023

- Assess survey data for coffee collection program and make improvements
- **March 2023:** County digester opens – NL makes weekly deliveries
- **April 2023:** Soft launch of trial composting Trailer Park Program, ended after 3 months
- **Nov 2023:** Coffee ground pickups end at 2/3 locations

2022

- Collection begins at Indoor Farmers Market
- **March 2022:** CSC members attend CCE compost workshop
- **May 2022:** Tabling held at outdoor market.
- **Aug 2022:** One farmer recruited to pick up from Farmers Market
- **Nov 2022:** Survey restaurants involved in coffee collection

2021

- Informally design and establish coffee ground collection at restaurants
- Collaborate with Columbia County’s pilot food waste collection program
- Survey Trailer Park for composting interest

2020

- CSC Task Force Established