

January 16, 2024

To: Delegate Karen Keys-Gamarra

From: Rick Galliher, 2268 Compass Point Lane, Reston VA 20191

Team Lead for Solid Waste and Recycling for FACS; Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions

Subject: Support of HB166; Guidance for Composting Programs in Local Schools

Dear Delegate Key-Gamarra;

FACS supports HB166. The largest problem trying to expand composting in Virginia schools is the lack of information on how to do it – what works, and what doesn't. There are many school systems across the nation that are composting, but each Virginia school official that wants to compost must figure out how to do it on their own. We need an organized approach. There is not a one-size-fits-all method that will work for everyone. DEQ should be the clearinghouse for information on what works around the nation, what works currently in Virginia and what is being evaluated or should be tested.

FACS has been asking Fairfax County Schools to develop a compost diversion program for their schools. The County's own audit ([JET report](#)) found compostable food was 30% of the total trash thrown away in the trash dumpsters. **There was more compost than trash.**

Table 10. Waste Audit Results for School Locations (% by Volume)

Material Type	Whitman Middle School	Stenwood Elementary School*	Luther Jackson Middle School*	South Lakes High School	Terraset Elementary School	AVG	Std Dev	Min	Max
Garbage	20%	30%	40%	25%	30%	29%	7%	20%	40%
Edible/ Recoverable Food	25%	15%	20%	10%	20%	18%	5%	10%	25%
Other Compostables	15%	35%	25%	40%	35%	30%	9%	15%	40%

Cafeterias generate most of a school's trash. Hundreds of schools around the County have used Zero Waste Sort Stations to separate the recyclables and compostables from the trash.



FACS would like every school to copy such a system. The hardest part of sorting the food share (18%), composting (30%) and recycling (23%) from actual trash (29%) is figuring out what to do with the compost at the end of the lunch period.

Composting in backyard style bins is out – the volume, along with the attraction of animals makes this unfeasible.

Hauling the composting away with a specialized service like Vetran’s Composting or Compost Crew is a school budget buster. Prince William County received a \$50k grant that lasted 2 years, and they were hauling from just 6 elementary schools to the nearest commercial compost facility. The schools were chosen because of their proximity to the facility in order to keep the cost down. There are 91 other schools in Prince William County. Fairfax Public Schools have 199 schools, and the commercial composting facility is further away.

Hauling is difficult, and not sustainable. The Leidos Corporation currently subsidizes the hauling from one Fairfax elementary school, with another in the works. This subsidy won’t last forever, nor does it make a dent in the compost generated by all the Fairfax schools.

There are a few promising “on site” options: The Ridan is a continuous feed composting machine capable of handling a school’s volume: compost is put in the top feeder daily, the hand crank is turned several times, and compost is removed from the other end into bins. Animals aren’t attracted to the sealed container, and it works in the winter. It is expensive up front, but cheaper than hauling after a year. A picture of the Ridan is below:

Decentralized: Compost Where Dumpsters Now Stand



Avoid hauling, land costs and restrictions
Food waste already handled here, where it's generated
Loop Closing

Compost is the largest single item in the school trash dumpster. The putrescible nature of the daily wet food attracts rodents and is expensive to haul away. This is good valuable material that is thrown away in a nonaerobic landfill where it doesn't decompose, or it is burned in an incinerator. Reducing the 30% of the trash that is rancid wet garbage will allow for fewer pickup of the trash dumpster – saving each school money on their trash service.

The problem is all this research and testing takes time and money, two items that are in short supply in a County School budget. Appropriate methods for each school must be investigated, planned, and implemented. Asking each school principal and PTA to set up a composting system is inefficient and leads to failure. A centralized information system set up by the DEQ is the best way to develop cost efficient and affective composting in all Virginia schools, not just Fairfax County.

FACS is a Northern Virginia focused faith-based organization with 2,000+ supporters from over 200 faith-based communities: churches, synagogues, mosques, congregations and even the unchurched. We work within our communities with our local elected officials and other leaders to combat climate change, reduce pollution, and make the world a better place for everyone's children.

Thanks,

