



Organic recycling a full-circle benefit

Collecting and recycling green waste is a business opportunity for a small but growing number of service companies.

By MARY BETH JANNAKOS

While recycling efforts have become a regular practice for many Americans, it's still common to see bags of leaves, grass clippings, brush and tree branches being carted off to landfills.

Many states still do not have legislation for recycling organic materials. Even in those which have passed laws, collected green waste is often transported to designated areas in landfills where it is not put to any good use. Where legislation fails, however, some businesses and private organizations are picking up the slack.

These groups have found that recycling often saves them money in collection costs while requiring minimal extra effort. Com-

panies are also realizing the benefits of preserving natural resources and projecting an environmentally friendly image.

Landfill? What's a landfill?

Grounds Keepers, a design/build construction and maintenance company located in Parker, CO, recycles its green waste despite the absence of a state law.

"We have always recycled. We don't take anything to the landfills," said Manager Jeff Roth. Grounds Keeper produces "a significant amount" of green waste each year, said Roth. As a result, the company employs the services of Organic Recycling Services, LLC (ORS) to pick up these items on a regular basis. ORS is a new company in the Denver Metro area which collects green waste for recycling. It operates like a waste disposal company by placing roll-off containers on its clients' sites.

"It costs our clients less money to use our services than having their organic material hauled off by traditional waste disposal companies," ORS Manager Joe Tingley said. This is how ORS maintains its

In the best recycling operations, piles of shredded organic waste are converted into compost or other useful products. Here, a CCL Organics tub grinder shreds large tree branches and stumps into material that can be recycled.

competitive advantage and attracts clients which may normally opt to mix organic material with their regular trash.

Beyond landscape companies

In addition to landscape maintenance companies that produce a large percentage of green waste, ORS is catering to an increasing number of private groups such as homeowner associations. (A report issued to the Colorado General Assembly in 1994 states that yard waste from residential and commercial properties represents the largest single component of the waste stream subject to waste diversion.)

If the national average is applied, then each person in Colorado produces about one ton of green waste per year. About three million tons of green waste are being

produced annually in the state. The U.S. EPA also reports that yard waste and food residue make up almost 25 percent of the 180 million tons of municipal solid waste which is generated each year nationwide.

ORS either provides a one-time collection service for residential organizations, or adds them to its regular schedule depending on the amount of their green waste. In addition, ORS also serves stables, lumber companies and other businesses which produce a large percentage of organic waste.

The company takes the collected material to a recycling facility near Golden, CO, which is operated by AL Organics, Inc., Colorado's largest, fully permitted, commercial organic recycling company. Here the items are turned into fertilizer and compost. ORS also provides the service of returning the recycled material to those clients which have a use for it.

Roth says it takes little or no effort on the part of Grounds Keepers to recycle its green

Look for more businesses, private organizations, and government agencies to team up with compost companies.

waste. "As Colorado's population continues to grow, it will become increasingly necessary for businesses to implement environmentally friendly practices," Tingley said.

Colorado isn't the only state in which businesses and private organizations are taking action. In California 50 percent of the waste stream must be diverted from landfills by the year 2000. Many are already employing the services of roll-off companies which transport the material to recycling facilities.

CCL Organics, which is in the East San Francisco Bay area, operates on the same

lines as that of ORS in Colorado.

"By choosing our services over another roll-off company, our clients are ensuring that their organic waste is being put to good use now. They are making a strong statement that the environment counts even in the realm of business," CCL Organics Manager Butch Benson said. In addition, CCL Organics helps its clients communicate this message to the public by providing them with mailing inserts and other public relations materials that help promote the company's environmentally friendly practices.

CCL differs slightly from ORS in Colorado since it handles the recycling process itself. The company's green waste collection site in Benicia, CA, converts the material into usable compost over a six-month period. CCL Organics then sells the compost to companies such as nurseries and landscape maintenance businesses. □

The author writes about Green Industry issues from her home in the Southwest.

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