

~ ***Council Embarks on Compost Product Quality Discussions*** ~

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The Composting Council of Canada

The Composting Council of Canada is a forum to advance and promote the use of composting to government, industry and the public as a means of reducing Canada's waste stream while reclaiming the organic fraction for beneficial purposes. Council efforts focus on information and communication, representation on expert multi-stakeholder committees of impact to the development of the composting industry and coordination of research initiatives. The Council's membership encompasses representation from all levels of government, industry (organic waste generators, compost system manufacturers and designers, facility operators, compost marketers) and academia.

Upcoming events of importance to the composting industry in Canada are:

- National Composting Conference and Exhibits (September 27 - 30; Edmonton).
- International Composting Awareness Week 2000 to be held from April 30 - May 6, 2000.

Mark your calendars now!

For more information, visit The Council's website: www.compost.org or call (416) 535-0240.

The composting industry needs to revisit our vision for the development of our products and the management of claims and communication for these products in the marketplace. The work done in the mid-90s by the industry and coordinated through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) and the Standards Council of Canada (through the BNQ) set the stage for the establishment of national compost product standards. This now needs to be reviewed to determine applicability and relevance to marketplace demands and expectations.

In Canada, three organizations are responsible for the development of standards and regulations for compost and composting: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), the provincial and territorial governments and the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) (through the *Bureau de normalisation du Québec* (BNQ)). This collective responsibility reflects government regulatory requirements (of both the AAFC and the provinces and territories) as well as voluntary industry initiatives (BNQ).

The scope of their responsibilities is as follows:

- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) regulates compost under the authority of the *Fertilizers Act and Regulations*. All compost that is sold in Canada must comply with the requirements of the *Fertilizers Act*. This includes provisions for product safety, benefit claims and labelling.
- The provinces and territories regulate the disposal and use of waste, including its production and use. Consequently, compost which is produced and used is regulated within this jurisdiction. The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) assists to coordinate provincial and territorial initiatives wherever possible.
- The BNQ, acting on behalf of the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) establishes voluntary industry standards and endorses products which meet these standards.

The development of compost standards was coordinated by the three organizations to establish and maintain high standards for product quality and safety while maximizing uniformity thereby facilitating industry competitiveness. This innovative approach has resulted in the establishment of the following:

- a National Standard of Canada entitled: Organic Soil Conditioners - Composts (BNQ);
- Guidelines for Compost Quality (CCME); and
- future amendments to the *Fertilizers Act and Regulations* (AAFC).

These provide for a significant level of national consistency by containing virtually identical technical requirements while ensuring that the mandates and interests of the different organizations are realized.

Our standards were developed from the prime perspective of ensuring product safety. This is fundamental to marketplace confidence.

But the “rules” surrounding the marketing of our compost products need to be much more than a safety issue. The composting industry needs to make sure that we set the “rules” for what we say our products are, what they do and how they can be used.

We also need to make sure that everyone in the composting industry embrace these rules. And complies with them.

The Composting Council of Canada is about to embark on a series of extensive industry consultation sessions. The objectives for these sessions are to determine the needs of the marketplace (ie. our end users), the technical feasibility of meeting those needs and what adjustments, if any, have to be made to existing standards to meet the needs of our consumers.

These sessions will be designed to help shape our collective vision for how we best can develop the products and categories that our consumers want.

The benefit for our industry is that we will be able to build market demand which will strengthen the industry’s position in the marketplace. We will be able to create a category called “compost” which will meet the needs of a broad number of end users for a variety of applications. This will lead to industry growth and sustainability.

As a first step, we need to make sure that all members of the industry understand the existing compost standards as established. It is critical that we understand what each standard really is and which part of the composting industry is affected by each standard. As the industry, we also need to understand from the standard-setting organizations what the process is for reviewing these standards to incorporate new learning and criteria (eg. labelling).

As an industry, we also need to discuss ways to ensure that we are providing reliable and user-friendly information about our products in our labelling and marketing materials. Right now, there is limited consistency of information in the marketplace. This can make it difficult for consumers to understand product use requirement and product differences. There is an opportunity to enhance the product labelling and information to better enable the consumer to choose the right product for the right use. We need to make sure that we establish common rules for product claims and use instructions.

The Council's interest in pursuing this initiative is not to limit trade or the individual marketing plans of industry members. Rather, it is to ensure that we have a baseline from which everyone can play and that collectively, we retain and build the confidence of our end users to build volume for the benefit of the entire industry.

Our business is in the manufacturing of quality products that provide meaningful value to our consumers. We need to develop a better understanding of the needs of these customers and incorporate this learning into the development of our products. On behalf of The Council, we invite you to join in this process to shape our collective destiny.