



SUCCESSFUL COMPOSTING: Marketing Opportunities

Defining the Issue

The last decade has seen the composting industry make great advances in our understanding of how to produce a top quality finished product. As we shift our focus from simple waste diversion to production and promotion of a marketable commodity, we are faced with very underdeveloped demand: there are many more industries, departments, businesses and homeowners who could benefit from using our product than are currently doing so! Prioritizing active market development is key in our drive to ensure that organics recycling is sustainable.

Key Concepts

Marketing your compost successfully depends first on knowing exactly what you have to offer. Being able to actively and accurately present the benefits of using your compost to potential customers is the surest way to establish your product and your facility as reliable. In a marketplace where consumers expect sellers to convince them to buy a particular product, composters need to be ready to compete with traditional soil amendments and planting media, demonstrating that compost is an excellent alternative.

To market effectively, you will need to be completely familiar with:

- **Your process:** what type of compost your facility is capable of producing, in terms of nutrient content, consistency, texture, and inert contaminant levels (i.e. plastics, glass). This can be affected by the characteristics of your feedstock stream, including seasonal variations, and by the effectiveness and set-up of your separating and processing equipment.
- **Your product:** the agronomic characteristics and capabilities of your product
- **Your potential market:** the characteristics that your potential customers are looking for in a product, and how your compost can supply those demands.

Many of the potential markets for Canadian compost are established industries with defined performance requirements, and compost will have to prove itself capable of meeting or exceeding buyers' expectations. Whether they are growing and maintaining turf, producing trees or plants for sale, or maintaining fruit orchards, commercial growers are familiar with the requirements of their particular crops. To target a particular market effectively, it is absolutely crucial to develop a thorough understanding of that market's particular needs. Compost producers need to be completely familiar with the capabilities of their particular process and with the characteristics of their own product in order to demonstrate and explain the relevant benefits compost can provide to specific groups of horticultural producers. In the long run it is in the best interests of both your individual facility and the Canadian composting industry to ensure that your compost is well-matched with your customers' needs and that they have all of the necessary information on use and possible limitations. Ensuring their success is an investment in your own future.

The following list, and the references that follow, can serve as a springboard for further investigation. This is not intended to be an exhaustive review of performance requirements for each of the identified industry and market sectors. Once you have identified several promising opportunities, it is strongly recommended that you pursue further investigation to thoroughly understand what potential buyers in your region are looking for. In addition to Internet research, this may include reviewing research, reading trade journals, contacting industry associations, interviewing individual growers on their practices, requirements, and preferences, and conducting performance tests using your own compost, both at your own facility and in partnership with potential users.

Potential Compost Markets/End Users

There are generally accepted to be two types of compost markets: **volume markets** and **dollar markets**. These categories are not completely firm as some

applications may fall into either type depending on the situation. In general, though, a **volume** market customer is willing to purchase large amounts of compost from you but, because of the amount needed, is unwilling to pay a high per unit price. **Dollar** market customers usually have much more stringent quality requirements and so are willing to pay considerably more for the finished product. They often require much smaller total volumes.

EXAMPLES OF VOLUME MARKETS:

- ❑ **Reclamation:** [Department of Transportation; Conservation Societies; military bases; private resource extraction companies] require large amounts of compost to reclaim road shoulders, mine sites, explosives testing grounds, oil and gas sites, and wetland areas. Quality of compost required depends on the specific job requirements.
- ❑ **Agriculture:** [organic farmers; market gardeners; fruit and vegetable producers; orchard and vineyard managers; forage and cereal crop growers] can use compost to boost soil fertility, reduce irrigation requirements, maintain organic grower status, reduce inorganic fertilizer inputs, and improve soil structure.
- ❑ **Nurseries/Silviculture:** [nursery stock producers; Christmas tree farmers; forest reclamation suppliers; pulp and paper producers] can produce trees of market size more quickly, or larger trees within the same growing schedule. Compost can maintain soil fertility and help replace material removed with rootstock.
- ❑ **Sod:** can produce a denser, more drought-stress and disease resistant crop. Can use compost to restore soil fertility and replace material removed when sod is cut.
- ❑ **Turfgrass:** [sports fields, playgrounds, public parks] as part of the base material compost can encourage strong root formation, drought resistance, and

drainage to ensure surface remains playable. Finely screened compost can be used to topdress established turf to provide nutrients and encourage aeration.

- ❑ **Civic Works projects:** [shoulders on roadways, bridgeworks; landscaping; mulching] compost can function in erosion control and quick establishment of new vegetative cover. Compost-amended beds show improved survival rate for newly transplanted trees, shrubs, and flowers, and plantings require less irrigation. Compost used as mulch can help retain soil moisture and reduce weed growth.
- ❑ **Construction contractors:** can use to control water erosion on active construction sites and help speed the establishment of lawns, parks, and median strips.
- ❑ **Topsoil:** blenders creating standard or specialized mixes can incorporate compost to improve the fertility and organic matter content of their products.
- ❑ **Landfill cover:** used as daily cover, compost provides biofiltering effects to reduce emission of odorous gases and methane. Compost incorporated into final capping speeds the establishment of new vegetation and helps prevent wind and water erosion.
- ❑ **Biofiltering:** industries needing to scrub process air may find a biofilter constructed with active compost to be an effective, low-tech, and relatively low cost solution.

EXAMPLES OF DOLLAR MARKETS:

- ❑ **Retail sales:** [retail greenhouses, landscaping do-it-yourself stores, hardware and department store chains] supply primarily home gardeners, who look for convenient packaging, “rich” colour and earthy aroma, fine, uniform texture, and safety for use with vegetable crops.
- ❑ **Golf Courses:** finely-screened compost can be used to topdress fairways and greens, mixed with sand in building new greens and tee boxes, and

incorporated into landscaping and flowerbed plantings. Compost can promote strong turf establishment, reducing the need for irrigation and improving drought-stress tolerance. Compost is being investigated for its ability to suppress common turf diseases.

- ❑ **Rainwater filters:** several companies are using compost in a variety of formats to filter rainwater from streets, parking lots, construction areas.
- ❑ **Greenhouses:** greenhouse growers demand a consistent product they can use with confidence, often with sensitive young plants. Compost can be used to reduce watering requirements, increase plant growth and heartiness, and provide some types of disease protection.
- ❑ **Home gardeners:** those not wishing to sell compost through a retail chain can market their own product directly to the public. Horticultural clubs and societies can be an excellent source of contact and promotion.
- ❑ **Landscapers and Lawn Care Companies:** decreasing availability of good quality topsoil is making compost an attractive alternative if a consistent product with positive agronomic characteristics can be supplied. A finely screened compost can be used to topdress for customers wanting to use organic lawncare methods.

This sampling of compost market options is not exhaustive. Regional variations and specialties will offer a unique set of potential markets to every compost producer.

Useful References:

[please note: these are only examples of the helpful on-line resources available]

GENERAL

Compost marketing: <http://www.ashs.org/ashspress/compost.html>

<http://www.compostmanagement.com/usingourproducts.html> (example)

Compost Uses Factsheets: <http://www.recycle.com/compost/compost.html>

Markets for Finished Compost (*BioTec Systems*):

<http://www.biotececosystems.com/market/finished.html>

End-Market Networks (Ontario): <http://www.compost.org/Endusers%20Summary.PDF>,
http://www.compost.org/wdo_end1.html

Marketing Regulations in Canada: <http://www.compost.org/complete.PDF>

COMMERCIAL GROWERS

Compost Use in Vineyards:

<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Publications/Organics/44399005.doc>

Compost for Strawberry Fields, Home Gardens:

<http://www.ext.vt.edu/news/releases/033099/litter.html>

Agriculture and Silviculture: <http://www.recycle.com/compost/compost.html>

Mulching with Compost: http://www.agroforester.com/articles/Sheet_Mulching.html

Composted Organic Materials on Tree Seedlings: <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/compost/>

Landscaping and Nurseries:

<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Publications/Organics/44201030.doc>

<http://www.recycle.com/compost/compost.html>

<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Publications/Organics/42198008.doc>

Disease Suppression: <http://www.epa.gov/spdpublic/mbr/compost3.html>

Sports turf: <http://www.recycle.com/compost/compost.html>

Golf Courses: <http://www.audubonintl.org/resources/casestudies/nrthshorecc.htm>
<http://campus.devalcol.edu/linded/compost.htm>

RECLAMATION AND BIOREMEDIATION

Environmental Applications—overview:

<http://www.environmental-expert.com/magazine/biocyte/april/article3.htm>

Bioremediation and Pollution Prevention:

<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/compost/>

Highway Construction:

<http://www.dot.state.tx.us/insdtdot/orgchart/des/landscape/compost/topsoil.htm>

Composting of Contaminated Soils: <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/compost/>

<http://aec.army.mil/prod/usaec/et/restor/bioremed.htm>

<http://www.environmental-expert.com/magazine/biocyclus/may/article3.htm>

Composting as an Environmental Remediation Technology:

<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/compost/>

Reforestation, Wetlands Restoration, and Habitat Revitalization:

<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/compost/>

Composted Biosolids in Land Reclamation:

<http://www.nwbiosolids.org/q&a/landreclamation.html>

Bioswales: <http://www.cwc.org/organics/organic.htm/cm963rpt.htm>

Erosion Control and Landscaping: <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/compost/>

<http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/B1200.htm>

Stormwater filtering and sediment control:

http://www2.state.id.us/deq/water/stormwater_catalog/doc_bmp41.asp

http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/airwaste/wm/recycle/Compost_sum/Use_Mulch.htm

http://www.dot.state.tx.us/insdtdot/orgchart/des/landscape/compost/berm_examples.htm

<http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/B1200.htm>

Compost for Erosion Control:

<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Publications/default.asp?pubid=787>

MUNICIPAL PROJECTS

Civic Works Departments: <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Organics/Products/QandA.htm>

Landfills: http://www.forester.net/msw_0012_solution.html

BIOFILTERS

<http://www.trgbiofilter.com/clearingair.htm>

<http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/compost/odors/odortreat.html>

HOME GARDENING

Home Gardening: <http://www.recycle.com/compost/compost.html>

<http://extension.usu.edu/publica/gardpubs/compos03.pdf>

<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/compost/erosion.pdf>

<http://www.ext.vt.edu/news/releases/033099/litter.html>

Mulching with Compost: http://www.agroforester.com/articles/Sheet_Mulching.html

Additional Informational Links:

US Composting Council: <http://compostingcouncil.org/index.cfm>

Cornell Composting: http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/compost/Composting_homepage.html

US Environmental Protection Agency Composting: <http://www.epa.gov/compost/>

The Composting Association of the UK: http://www.compost.org.uk/dsp_home.cfm

Washington State University Compost Connection: <http://csanr.wsu.edu/compost/>

Compost Education and Resources for Western Agriculture:

<http://www2.aste.usu.edu/compost/>

Recycling and Composting Online: <http://www.recycle.cc/>

Feedback:

Are you an operator who has had experiences—faced particular challenges, solved specific problems—that would be of help to other operators? To share tips or solutions your facility has developed with regards to the subjects in this fact sheet, please click on the button below. Thanks for sharing your practical ingenuity!

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