



Newsletter

Common Cause Co-operative
Supporting a local sustainable food economy

Municipal Green Waste Compost



On the 2nd October the OATES Project held a workshop on composting at Plumpton College. Charlie Trousdell of TJ

Composting Services Ltd presented the benefits and challenges of green waste compost schemes.

In the UK there is the potential to compost 20 million tonnes of green waste. This could have a significant impact on waste going to land fill sites and could recycle local waste for local food production. Although the composting of municipal green waste offers significant benefits to farmers and waste managers, it is also currently hampered by regulations and financial disincentives.

Green waste is garden waste collected from local dumps, Civic Amenity (CA) sites) run by the County Councils or as part of doorstep collections. Doorstep collections, which are the responsibility of District Councils, have in the past included uncooked kitchen waste. New DEFRA rules following Foot and Mouth now prohibit the use of kitchen waste. This should change, and it might become possible to include food waste if the compost is contained.

In the US, the composting of municipal green waste is big business. Most of our information on the benefits and best practice of municipal composting comes from north America. In the UK it is a more recent activity. Landfill costs have been very low in the past, about £7 per tonne, so local authorities had no incentive to compost. With new European legislation and the introduction of the landfill tax the cost of land filling has greatly increased. Typically landfill charges in the south are now in the region of £25 per

tonne, and composting is becoming a viable option.

In East Sussex, both Country Council (ESCC) and Wealden District council waste has been composted on organic farms with varying degrees of success. East Sussex County Council are currently putting out to tender the job of managing the county's waste for the next 25 years. It is not known whether there will be opportunities for on-farm composting in the future.

What Farmers Can Do

TJ Composting will be able to sell compost within 6 months, and are looking to establish more partnerships with farmers in East Sussex and Kent. Farmers can also develop small-scale schemes in co-operation with local landscape gardeners. If farmers are processing less than 1000m³ cubed of material at any one time they can apply for exemption from a waste

management license. The farm cannot sell compost but can charge for taking waste for composting. Farms are advised to agree plans with local planners and the Environment Agency may want to inspect the site. Issues of concern are likely to be road usage and water contamination. If you have a particular site in mind the Community Composting Network (CNN) can give you specific advice and help.

See Page Two
for Useful Tips
and Contacts

October 2001

Volume 1 Issue 2

Inside this issue:

Green Waste Compost	1
Useful Tips and Contacts for starting a Green waste compost scheme	2
Organic Farming Support in Northern France	4
About Common Cause	4

Benefits of green waste compost:

- **Provides a source of NPK** and other key elements. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) trials (see web site addresses on p.2) consistently show increase in crop yield from application of compost to a range of field grown crops.
- **Adds organic matter to soils** Research suggests that plants grown in soils with high organic matter content are better able to take in nitrogen and so less nitrogen needs to be applied.
- **Helps suppress disease** The use of compost to suppress plant diseases is a central 'plank' of organic farming.
- **With a Ph of around 7.5** compost can have a beneficial liming effect.

Municipal Green Waste Compost continued.....

Useful Contacts:

TJ Composting Services

Charlie Trousdell
Tel: 01273 261163
Email: Charlie@tjcomposting.co.uk

The Composting Association

Avon House
Tithe Barn Road,
Wellingborough
Northamptonshire
NN8 1DH
Tel: 01933 227 777 Fax: 01933 441 040
www.compost.org.uk

Soil Association

Bristol House
40-56 Victoria Street
Bristol
BS1 6BY
Tel: 0117 929 0661 Fax: 0117925 2504
www.soilassociation.org.uk

Community Composting Network (CCN)

67 Alexandra Road, Sheffield S2 3EE,
Tel/Fax: 0114 2580483.
email: ccn@gn.apc.org
www.othas.org.uk/ccn

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) web sites

<http://warp.nal.usda.gov>
http://warp.nal.usda.gov/afsic/AFSIC_pubs/qb9701.htm

Useful tips for starting a green waste composting scheme:

- Planning permission is almost always required.
- Get in touch with the Composting Association for their standards pack. (See contact details below).
- Make sure that you have a mutually beneficial agreement with the waste company. Be very clear about what the obligations and requirements are of all parties involved.
- Cardboard looks horrible but composts fine if not in too high quantities.
- A waste management licence is required to sell compost. The sale value of compost with Soil Association symbol is around £4-5 per tonne for bulk orders and around £40 per tonne sold in small volumes.
- Gain an understanding of the composting process and the microbial activity in your soils. Immature compost applied too early can cause nitrogen to be removed from the soil.
- Find out what the NPK analysis is and what application is required for your fields. There may be conditions when it is not appropriate to apply green waste compost.
- Use the internet to find out the latest research data coming out of the US.

Unsightly Plastic Rubbish

One of the main problems of green waste composting schemes is plastic rubbish – composting sites can look horrible. Rubbish can be filtered out during the composting process but local authorities need to do a lot more to raise public awareness to reduce this contamination.

Organic Farming Support in Northern France

In September, Topsy Jewell (from Common Cause Co-op's OATES Project) and Anne-Marie Bur (from Sussex Rural Community Council) visited the French regions of Picardie and Nord Pas de Calais. The aim of the research visit was to find out about activities that support organic farming in northern France and bring back ideas and lessons for organic farming in Sussex.

Farming operations are relatively large scale and industrial compared to other regions in France, and organic agriculture is relatively less developed. In spite of this, there is significant support coming from government and regional council programmes. There is a strong demand for organic produce, especially since recent food scares, and this is reflected in the successful marketing activities of organic producers and in the growing demand for organic school meals in the region.

In France, every region has an organic association that has developed independently of the Government's certification body. In Picardie, the Chamber of Agriculture and the Association of Organic Agriculture Producers of

Picardie (AABP) work together to provide technical and promotional support including: support for conversion, training, farmer networks, developing innovative marketing activities such as co-operatives, collective marketing and direct marketing, and promoting organics to the public.

Because it is done at a regional and even departmental level it is highly relevant to the farmers in each locality. The support is funded by both the State and Regional Councils. See following pages for reports of meetings with producers and the support organisations.



Organic Farming Support in Northern France cont.....

The Support Organisations

Our hosts were Frédéric Galon and Olivier Desmarest. Frédéric has been working with the Chamber of Agriculture to develop organic agriculture in Picardie since 1992. Olivier works for the Association of Organic Producers of Picardie (AABP) which was founded in 1992. Of the 120 organic farms in Picardie (1% of all farms), 100 are members of the AABP.

The Chamber of Agriculture and AABP work closely together. The Chamber provides technical support to farmers including 3 advisors for arable and 1 for dairy (there are 15 dairy producers). The Chamber helps farmers to network and meet together through trainings and the advisory service. A one day meeting is held each year for all the advisors and producers to talk about development work in the region. About 30 farmers attend the meetings. The technical advisors and AABP also meet every month to co-ordinate the programme of trainings and meetings.

AABP, which is a trade union for organic farmers, does promotional work, helping individual member farms with publicity, providing information to consumers and organising farm open days. They send a monthly newsletter to all their members. Future development plans include:

- Piloting an organic vegetable box scheme
- A feasibility study for a direct marketing collective of producers.
- A feasibility study for collective, direct marketing of meat.
- A monthly organic market.
- Production of a common logo or trademark: "Bio Picardie".
- 350 organic school meals at a secondary school during the Week of Taste in October.

Contact details: bio.picardie@wanadoo.fr
www.biopicardie.com

Key Findings

- Significant funding by regional councils and the state for regional organisations that support farms and promote organic food to the public.
- Regional and local nature of the support structures. Good co-ordination and communication between the different organisations.
- Regional Organic Farmers' Associations that take on promotion, networking, marketing, distribution and trade union responsibilities.
- Personalised relationship between the staff on the support programmes, producers, shops, and other parts of the supply chain.
- Importance of promotion of organics to the general public to help expand market for local producers.
- Specific promotion, networking and marketing initiatives eg: aprons, signs, personalised leaflets, newsletter, organic markets (urban and rural), regular promotional events, and links with school meal provision.
- Opportunities for partnership projects and regional training between Picardie, Nord Pas de Calais and the Sussex area.

Meeting with Jean-Louis Christen - Organic Market Gardener

Jean-Louis Christen is an organic market gardener. He owns 2.18 ha. of land near the Somme River in Amien called *Les Hortillonnages*. *Les Hortillonnages* is an area of 300 ha of which 25 ha are cultivated by professional market gardeners. Historically, Amien was famous for its fresh vegetable production and used to supply the whole region.

Jean Louis' main products are fresh vegetables and sauerkraut. He told us that he grows 3,500 square metres of white cabbage and produces about 12 tonnes of sauerkraut per season made in 3 days with 5 people. He sells almost entirely direct at his farm shop (open Wednesday and Friday evenings) and at a Saturday market in Amien. The sauerkraut is also sold at an organic market in Paris.

In 1999, the Regional Council funded the branding of produce from *Les Hortillonnages*. Their logo is "eat regional eat seasonal". £50,000 was spent on leaflets, signs, logos and public campaigns. Advertisements were placed in buses and at bus stops in a drive to encourage shoppers to buy local produce.

Jean Louis is a member of the AABP's direct sales group that includes: livestock, vegetable, fruit, eggs, and honey

producers. They meet regularly and have agreed to set up selling points (eg farm shops) to sell each others produce. There is concern, though, about the long distances between producers and the group are discussing the use of a depot and van. Storage and delivery for small producers who want to collectively direct market are common issues in both the UK and France.

We talked about ideas for 'vegetable trading exchanges' between Picardie and Sussex. It was difficult to think of fresh produce that is unique to each region. We found out that runner beans are not grown in Picardie. Jean Louis invited Sussex growers to come and sell runner beans at their new organic market! Picardie specialities include lentils and buckwheat 'pancake' flour and of course Jean Louis' sauerkraut - anyone interested?





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Common Cause Co-operative was established in 1991 in Lewes, East Sussex. It is a not-for-profit co-operative company limited by guarantee. Common Cause supports activities that have long term social, economic and environmental benefits. One of our objectives is to support sustainable food production and consumption.

Recent activities include Just Trade, an organic food co-op, the Lewes Farmers' Market, and OATES (Organic Agriculture Training in East Sussex). OATES is a project that was initiated in 2000 in partnership with East Sussex County Council and Plumpton College to provide training for unemployed people in organic horticulture.

A second phase of the OATES project runs until December this year. We are researching the needs of organic agriculture in the Sussex area and running free training courses for producers. Common Cause is also a member of the School Food Action Group. We are developing a project to explore the feasibility of linking local producers with school meal provision.

Organic Farming Support in Northern France cont... Meeting with Christian Cotrel - Organic Egg Producer

We met Christian at his family farm in the suburbs of Amien. Until 1999, Christian had been a conventional arable farmer and in the past his parents had a battery egg unit. Christian says that he knew nothing about organic production and became interested through an event organised by the Chamber of Agriculture to bring conventional farmers in to contact with organic producers.

Christian now has 500 organic hens in a barn where his parents once housed 2,300 hens. He sells his eggs direct from the house (he is open 5-8 pm 6 days a week), at a weekly Farmers' Market and through other members of AABP such as Jean Louis Christian. Christian in turn sells other selected organic produce from his house.

Christian has 47 ha of arable land which he is slowly converting. He told us that he spends more time in his fields but makes more money from his eggs. We asked Christian why he had decided to go organic. He said that he has been farming the family farm since 1981 and felt that the land was saturated with chemicals. He was also interested in organics for financial reasons. A farm of his small size producing cereals couldn't compete and wouldn't have survived for much longer.

We asked Christian what problems he faces. The organic rules require that his barn is left empty for one month each year before new hens are introduced. There is then a period of around three weeks when the eggs from the new hens are too small to sell. Dur-



Christian wearing one of the aprons produced by AABP for the organic producers who sell at markets and food fairs.

ing this 7 week period, Christian has to buy in eggs to ensure continuity with customers (luckily his sister is also a producer of organic eggs). Finding a vet that can treat organic hens is another problem he told us.

We also asked Christian how the Chamber of Agriculture and AABP have helped. With technical advice and by putting him in touch with other organic producers he told us. The AABP also produce and part pay for publicity leaflets. Through the Chamber and AABP Christian met with other organic egg producers. He is now also part of the direct marketing group. Once his land has organic status he plans to diversify to grow potatoes, wheat for milling and cabbages for Jean Louis.