

Frequently Asked Questions

The NYC Department of Education and Department of Sanitation Organics Collection Program is in over 300 schools during the 2013-2014 school year. The goal is to collect the organic material from school cafeterias and kitchens, in order to reduce waste sent to costly landfills. This offers a unique opportunity to save NYC taxpayer money and benefit our environment. Organics Collection requires students to sort recyclables and separate food waste prior to dismissal from the cafeteria.

Here are some common questions schools have had while establishing Organics Collection, and possible solutions. If you have questions not found in this guide or are in need of further assistance, please contact the DOE Office of Sustainability, at sustainability@schools.nyc.gov or visit www.nyc.gov/organics

Q: We keep meat, grease and bones out of my backyard composting bin. Why is this different at school?

A: The NYC Department of Sanitation transports the organic waste daily to commercial facilities, which can break down all organic material safely, including meat and bones.



Q: Won't meat, grease and bones attract vermin?

A: Because the organic waste is contained in enclosed rigid plastic composting bins and is no longer sitting in plastic bags curbside, problems with attracting vermin should decrease.

Q: If organic material decomposes in a landfill anyway, why collect organics separately?

A: Modern landfills typically have little dirt, oxygen, and few microorganisms that enable biodegradable material to naturally decompose. Organic material is also a valuable commodity, as it can be composted and used as a natural fertilizer, and/or used to create energy – reducing costs for NYC.

Q: How do we teach students to sort their cafeteria waste? How long will it take?

A: There are several ways to efficiently educate students about what materials are accepted under the Organics Collection and Recycling Programs, and the importance of reducing waste. The amount of time it will take will depend on the expectation established for cafeteria behavior, and educational activities and events that reinforce cafeteria sorting.

Here are ten suggestions that can be adapted for different ages:

1. Hold an assembly and/or kick-off event to announce Organics Collection, explaining how to sort cafeteria items (ask SchoolFood staff for samples)
2. Make sure all faculty and staff at the school are familiar with the new set up so they can offer support
3. Organize a cafeteria monitor program, letting students take a leadership role
4. Have teachers offer classroom instruction to smaller groups
5. Integrate recycling and composting themes into art, science, language arts, math, & communications classes
6. Remind students during morning announcements
7. Reinforce the new behavior with a contest and awards
8. Make it public: measure progress in the school newspaper, website, or on a bulletin board
9. Have students sign a stewardship pledge
10. Let student councils and clubs take an active role, and create additional signage and decorate stations



Multiple sorting stations will shorten lines and speed up dismissal

Q: What are some tips for set up and maintenance of the sorting stations?

A: Consistency is the key to establishing new behaviors at school. Place the bins in the same location every day, with clear signage on each bin. DO NOT place any trash bins in the cafeteria away from the sorting station, as this will encourage disposal without sorting.

Q: What if there are regular “traffic jams” at the cafeteria sorting stations?

- Stagger lunchtime dismissal by table or section, as needed, to allow extra time at the sorting station
- Set up a sorting station that is accessible from two sides
- Create two or more sorting stations in the cafeteria
- Position a monitor at the sorting station to assist students while they learn the new system



Q: Where do we place signage so the bins are clearly marked?

- Place in same location every day
- Attach the signs with wooden markers
- Hang signs from the ceiling above bins
- Signs can be attached to a wall directly behind the bin
- Tape instructions to cafeteria tables

Remind students to remove food from wrappers and plastic bags before emptying food scraps. Plastic utensils, milk and juice cartons get recycled with the metal, glass and plastic.



Q: What about when students and/or staff eat outside the cafeteria?

A: The Sustainability Coordinator, Custodian Engineer, Principal and other interested staff and faculty can meet to discuss additional efforts to collect organic waste outside the cafeteria. Special designated bins are used for food scraps in the cafeteria to ensure cleanliness and efficient collection routes. These bins are placed on the curb daily by 4:00pm. So any additional efforts must be coordinated with custodial staff.

Q: How can I learn more?

A: Contact the DOE Office of Sustainability: sustainability@schools.nyc.gov OR visit www.nyc.gov/organic

Q: What are the staff’s responsibilities in implementing Organics Collection?

<p style="text-align: center;">SchoolFood Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up sorting stations with custodial staff • Empty, rinse, and return liquids bucket as needed • Wipe down sorting stations as needed • Contribute food scraps to your kitchen organics bin 	<p style="text-align: center;">School Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orient students on cafeteria sorting • Periodically check on signage and station condition • Reinforce students cleaning up after themselves, not leaving trash behind on tables or the floor 	<p style="text-align: center;">Custodial Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with SchoolFood to set up sorting stations • Ensure bins are labeled with decals and signs • Bring food scrap bins to curbside by 4:00pm, and bring them inside after collection
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For more information contact:
 The DOE Office of Sustainability
schools.nyc.gov/sustainability | sustainability@schools.nyc.gov

