

Climate and Compost: New Directions in NYC's Organic Waste Policy

Overview

Monday, October 29 and Tuesday, October 30, 2024

Information and Technology Building

151 East 25th Street

Day One (October 29): CUNY Compost Connections

After a general introduction to NYC's Organic Waste system, we will dive into the opportunities and challenges sustainable waste management at CUNY campuses, beginning from a facilities and operations perspective from those who work to handle our trash and recycling every day. We'll move on to highlight the transdisciplinary research on organic waste problems and solutions that our CUNY faculty and doctoral students are working on in natural, social, and engineering sciences, as well as humanities.

Day Two (October 30): NYC's Organic Waste Systems: Shaping a Sustainable Future

After a refresher overview, we will engage local practitioners and policymakers will discuss two crucial, under-addressed aspects of urban organic waste management in NYC: buildings, and data systems. Woven throughout these conversations will be considerations of residential and business behavior; land use and siting; processing and markets, and environmental justice.

CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

Seeking: CUNY researchers, full and part time faculty, and CUNY doctoral students, to present work at any stage of development, speaking approximately 10 minutes each, in up to two moderated panel sessions lasting 1 hour 15 minutes each. We are looking for research in the following areas:

- Community impacts of waste management systems, including health, land use, housing, and economic dimensions.
- Relations among compost, gardens/agriculture, and communities
- Connections between organic waste management and climate change
- Building-level labor and practice, as relates to work of custodial staff in waste management

- Data transparency and good governance, inside and outside of sphere of waste management
- Institutional and systemic racism, gender discrimination, ablism, and colonialist practice in urban waste management, especially around organic wastes
- Measurement, statistics, and performance analytics around waste management governance
- Other topics related to urban management of organic waste, in NYC or elsewhere.

Benefits of participation:

- Share and discuss ongoing research with interdisciplinary colleagues
- Build connections across CUNY schools
- No registration fee or out of NYC travel required
- BIPOC scholars and students especially encouraged to present.

Additional information:

- There are no stipends or grant funding associated with this call.
- Full draft paper will not be required, but will be read in advance by the Conference Organizer if submitted.
- Undergraduate and masters level students may be considered for poster-style presentations.
- Presentations from non-CUNY faculty and students may be considered but the CUNY community is prioritized.

How to apply.

Send the following information to the conference organizer, Samantha MacBride, at samantha.macbride@baruch.cuny.edu, with the words “Climate and Compost” in the title.

- Your name, scholar or student status, and CUNY affiliation
- Presentation title and 200 maximum abstract.
- Confirming your availability for the afternoon of October 29, 2024.

Decisions on final panelists are expected by September 15, 2024.

more conference information on following pages...

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Why a Conference?

Every year, New York City residents and businesses dispose of millions of tons of food scraps, yard trimmings, and other compostables in the trash. When landfilled or combusted, these organic wastes generate greenhouse gases, making waste disposal a leading contributor to New York State’s emissions profile. Keeping organic wastes out of disposal is a top priority for climate action, yet to date, **little progress toward this goal has been achieved.**

We know how to do things better. One major method features **composting**, which sequesters carbon, enriches soil health, and builds jobs. In fact, there is already a vibrant community of NGO’s and small businesses offering composting services citywide. **Extracting biogas** from organic wastes is another form of organic waste recycling which, *if done right and at an appropriate scale*, can work with composting to enhance climate benefits.

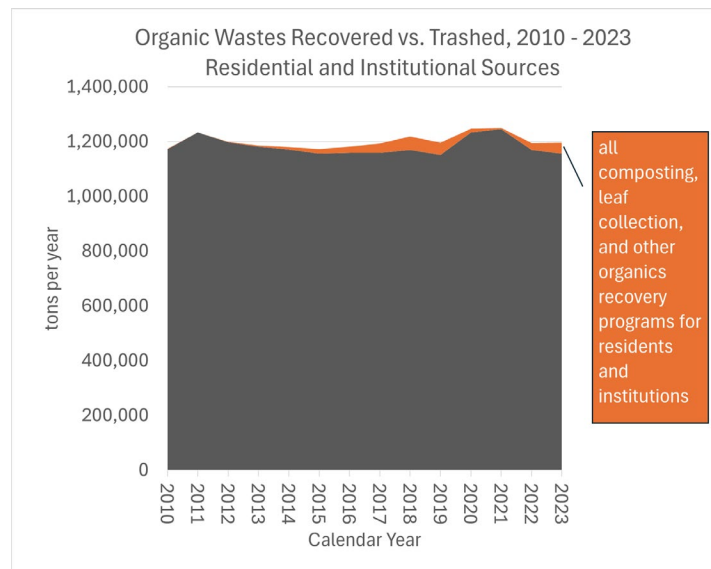


Figure 1. Data source: NYC Open Data. Grey portion represents organics that were trashed and sent to landfills despite existing programs for beneficial use. Commercial data is limited and not included in this graph but has a similar profile.

We're defining organic waste as:	
Food scraps, yard trimmings, landscaping discards and soiled/compostable paper – whether trashed or separated for beneficial use.	Edible food scraps redirected to human or animal consumption (food rescue, animal feed)
Treated sewage solids, including biosolids	Human and animal mortalities
Woody debris, including fallen trees	Other materials that move with organic waste, in particular compostable and non-compostable plastics.
Fats, oils and greases from restaurant operations	
Biogenic industrial residues	
We're open to other category suggestions	

The tools, technologies, and political will to recover organics are strong in NYC. But despite ten years of local and state goals, legislation, programming, and attention to this topic, NYC has **not prevented** more than miniscule quantities of organics from needless wasting. Today, some 1.2 million tons of residential/institutional organics (See

Fig. 1), another estimated 1 million tons of commercial food and landscaper wastes, and another 245,000 tons of treated sewage solids (not shown in Figure 1 due to data limitations), head to landfills and waste-to-energy combustors in the Eastern U.S. These figures, which have not declined substantially over time, **dwarf the total quantity of organics that are put to beneficial use.**

Public input and academic research suggests two important, but under addressed, drivers of the impasse of the last decade. First, there are widely acknowledged challenges to keeping organic wastes separate from trash at the level of **building operations and labor**. These affect all managed buildings, including walkups, tenements, highrises, schools, universities, government agencies, public facilities, and businesses. The built environment enables and constrains activities to train, educate, separate, store, set out, collect, transfer, and process organic wastes for beneficial use. Second, there is a clear need for improvement in measuring and reporting many types of **waste data**, including greater transparency and accountability among City agencies, and more use of NYC Open Data.

This conference convenes the public, students, faculty, researchers, activists, and practitioners to work through these two areas in depth. After an overview of the current organic waste management systems in NYC, and the research that is being done throughout CUNY to improve those systems, we will move on to in-depth, substantial dialogue on buildings and data issues, advancing groundwork that community organizations, local businesses, and City Departments have made to usher in organic waste recycling over the last decade. The outcome of this Conference will be a Public Report, with recommendations to the current City Administration for future areas of research and collaboration with CUNY.

Goals:

The two-day conference aims to:

1. Bring together CUNY faculty members and doctoral students across schools to showcase their work in research and teaching about waste issues and environmental sustainability.
2. Consider opportunities for future waste-related research, and teaching collaboration.
3. Provide a platform for a dialogue between among CUNY faculty, City government, private sector leaders, and local thought leaders.
4. Provide a platform for an exchange of ideas focused on critical research needs and the preparation of knowledgeable CUNY graduates ready to bring data-driven, socially just ideas to NYC through innovation and leadership.

Draft agenda – with details to follow

Monday, October 29, 2024

9:00 – 11:00 Welcoming remarks, overview of NYC’s Organic Waste Management Systems

11:00- 12:15 Session 1: Organics at CUNY

12:15 – 2:00 Keynote and Lunch

2:00 – 4:30 Session 2: Transdisciplinary waste research at CUNY

Tuesday, October 30, 2024

9:00 – 10:30 Welcoming remarks and convening

10:30 – 12:00 Session 3: Buildings and Organic Waste Management in NYC

12:00- 1:00 Keynote and Lunch

1:00- 2:30 Session 4: Data Needs for Effective Organic Waste Management practice

2:30 – 4:30 Taking stock and next steps

Conference Organizer and Contact

Dr. Samantha MacBride (she/her) has nearly 30 years experience in municipal waste management, and currently teaches urban environmentalism, public management, and program evaluation at Baruch College's Marxe School of Public and International Affairs. Her research and teaching focuses on urban sustainability and materials, specifically wastes. Dr. MacBride is also an Advisor to Earth Matter, a grassroots community composting organization located on Governors Island.

Dr. MacBride is the author of *Recycling Reconsidered: The Present Failure and Future Promise of Environmental Action in the United States*. (MIT Press, 2013) and other books and articles, focusing on waste policy and politics in NYC, and the United States.

Dr. MacBride welcomes questions and comments about this conference at:
samantha.macbride@baruch.cuny.edu.