

DRAFT

Poultry and Access to Food Scraps as part of a Composting System

Drafted by the Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation, Solid Waste Management Program and the Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets.

Increasingly Vermont's composters are allowing chickens access to food scraps prior to composting these materials. While this practice has potential benefits in light of the Vermont's Universal Recycling law, there are potential risks to the chickens, consumers and impacts to the environment and neighbors. This practice brings together two state of Vermont agency regulatory programs and in some instances federal regulation. In order to manage issues associated with this practice- to prevent nuisance conditions such as odors and pests, and to protect the environment, public health and safety- the Agency of Natural Resources, DEC Solid Waste Program and the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets provide the following guidance when poultry has access to compost inputs. This guidance also endeavors to make poultry owners aware of risks of engaging in this practice.

For the purposes of this guide, "food scraps" and "food residuals" are used interchangeably and include post-consumer food scraps.

Chicken Access and Composting Area: Any compost system needs to function year-round. Therefore, stable surfaces are required for deliveries of food scraps and tipping areas where food scraps can be emptied from trucks and then blended into a composting recipe. This area may be the same area where chickens access the food residuals.

- **Access to Food Scraps:** If you are using poultry as part of your composting system, it is still necessary to provide a commercial feed to meet the nutritional needs of the birds. To appropriately size a composting operation, a bird may forage on about 2 pounds of food scraps per day. While there is no nationally accepted standard, this is a rate commonly used in Vermont by composters. Chickens will not eat all the food scrap materials, therefore a composting or food scrap storage system must be in place to control pests and odors. Amounts greater than this are not likely to be foraged and should be directly managed as compost. The food scraps may remain uncovered for a maximum of six hours before they are either placed within a water tight container with a tight fitting lid for storage and composted later, or mixed and blended with carbon materials and other compost feedstocks to create an active composting pile.
- **Carbon & Recipe:** Composting systems should include the daily incorporation, mixing and coverage of high carbon bulking agents (dry hay/bedding, wood chips, shredded office paper, dry leaves) and other feedstocks with leftover food scraps to encourage active composting of food residuals such that odors are minimized and contained to the site. This practice coupled with capping new compost piles with a layer of cured compost and/or animal bedding and manure, can help limit odors, deter pests, and speed active, hot composting. A list of high carbon bulking agents can be found on ANR, DEC's composting webpage here <http://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wmp/SolidWaste/Documents/12321.HighCarbonBulkingAgentsCompostingProcedure.pdf>.
- **Pest prevention:** Composting systems should include pest prevention measures such as hardware cloth wraps around composting bin systems and hoop houses or other roof structure to prevent birds such as crows or seagulls from becoming a nuisance. Roof structures have the additional benefit of preventing rain or snow, which improves the control of moisture for the composting process. Egg laying operations in particular should take precautions to minimize pests access to materials to prevent vertical transmission of

Salmonella Enteritidis into eggs destined for consumption.

<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/GuidanceRegulation/UCM232271.pdf>

- **Water Quality:** Food residuals, manures, and plant matter (leaves, grass, silage, etc.) all contain nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen that can pollute waterways. Chicken access area as well as the compost blending and curing areas should be located away from lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, and water supplies to prevent water quality impacts. Maintaining buffers of perennial vegetation between composting areas and water bodies, and intercepting wood chip and cured compost berms can help absorb nutrients and limit nutrient loading.
- **Risks:** While allowing poultry access to post-consumer food scraps can be a step in a composting system and helps prevent food scraps from entering the state's landfill, all animal owners should use caution, and do so at their own risk. Post-consumer food scraps can contain substances harmful to chickens, and may result in disease transmission and death.

Applicability of Federal Regulations: If you are producing food for the commercial market (meat birds and eggs) you may be subject to the [Food Safety Modernization Act Final Rule for Preventive Controls for Animal Food](#) to protect both human and animal health. Poultry raised for personal consumption falls outside of the FSMA regulation. For more information on the Food Safety Modernization Act Final Rule for Preventative Controls for Animal Food regulation, please contact the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.