



# School Composting Case Study: Chittenden South Supervisory Union

Most Chittenden South Supervisory Union schools have waste-reduction programs that include composting and recycling. Champlain Valley Union High School (9-12) and Shelburne Community School (K-8) are two of them, which exemplify different approaches to achieving waste reduction goals, and show how programs evolve and improve over time.

**Beginnings:** Two dedicated parent volunteers led the effort to develop a composting program at the Shelburne Community School, bringing together the people who would be critical to the program, including teachers, administrators, and school staff, and obtaining training and educational materials from the Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD). Parent volunteers recruited someone to build a sort table for free, and found a local farmer willing to collect food scraps from the school. The school administration was minimally involved in working out the logistics of the program, but once the details of the program were settled, agreed to purchase compost buckets for the cafeteria.

## Chittenden South Supervisory Union

Number of students	
Shelburne Community School	778
Champlain Valley Union High School	1,284
Program start date	
Shelburne Community School	Dec. 2013
Champlain Valley Union High School	2004/Fall 2013
Net cost savings on waste disposal	
Shelburne Community School	\$180
Champlain Valley Union High School	\$0 (break-even)
Cost of compost collection	
Shelburne Community School	Food: Free Paper towels: \$4/tote
Champlain Valley Union High School	\$240/month

Food service workers and EnACT, a student environmental club, led the push for a composting program at Champlain Valley Union High School (CVU). The composting program actually began around 2004, but struggled with high rates of contamination due to poor design (separate, open bins for trash, recycling,

and food scraps, spread out through the cafeteria that discouraged students from separating their waste). The operational logistics of the original program also proved challenging, with responsibilities for emptying compost buckets from the cafeteria and classrooms given to students, who were often neglectful, further limiting the program's effectiveness and appeal.

Seeking to address these challenges and reinvigorate the program, EnACT members reengaged with stakeholders in 2013 to evaluate ways to improve. With help from a grant from



Shelburne Community School.  
Photo: David Kelly, Shelburne Community School

CSWD, the school created a new waste reduction system that included a central sort station, made custodians responsible for taking out the compost, and stopped—at least for now—composting in classrooms. EnAct members helped train students to use the sort station, particularly targeting new ninth graders, and also presented at a school assembly and faculty meeting.

**Today:** Shelburne Community School now has a split program, in which some food scraps stay on the school grounds for composting and use in the school vegetable and herb gardens, and the remaining food scraps are picked up by a local farmer. The cafeteria uses the food grown in the school garden, closing the loop on food waste at the school.

**Trash production declined 22%** in one year after installation of a new sort station in the cafeteria at CVU.



At CVU, students, staff, and parents are excited about the program, which has expanded to include the school's large restrooms. EnAct members help train new and returning students and faculty at the start of each year to ensure better sorting, and the school's net costs remain even with costs prior to the program.

*Champlain Valley Union High School. Photo: CSWD*

**Future:** Schools effectively diverting food scraps from their waste stream anticipate that some adjustments may have to be made in the future, as cafeterias change the products they use, and as compost technology evolves. The schools plan to continue regular training to help educate students about what to do with items such as disposable—or compostable—plates and utensils.

“We learned **the system has to make sense for someone in a hurry.** No matter how much people care and are educated, it won't work unless the system makes it easy.”

Katie Antos-Ketcham, EnACT advisor

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