



FAIRFAX RECYCLES

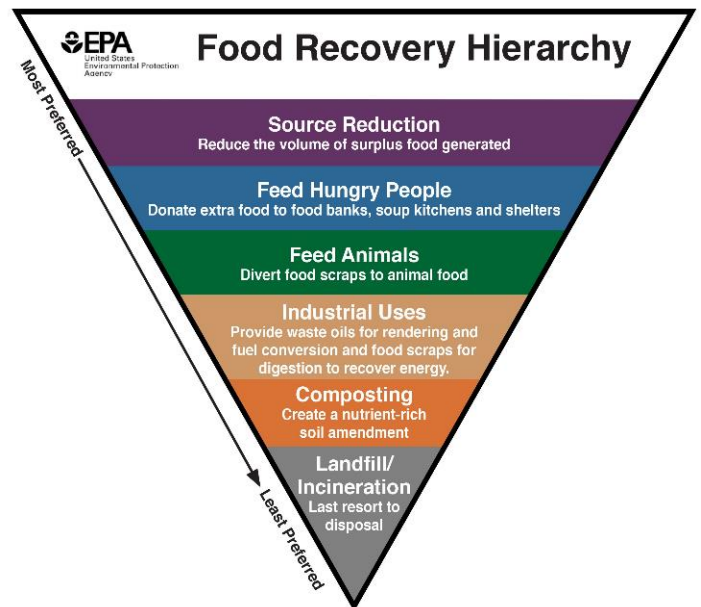


It's been quite a year! The pandemic has not slowed us down at all – the Fairfax County Solid Waste Management Program has been hard at work adjusting to our new normal AND improving the services we provide to our residents. We are exploring new ways to share information, including holding informative webinars for people that want to gain a better understanding of how we manage trash and recycling in Fairfax. We have also launched a new food scrap pilot program to determine the best way to reduce the amount of food that ends up in the trash.

In this issue of Fairfax Recycles, we are going to take a deep dive into the way we think about food. Food insecurity has always been a problem, but we are seeing more of it in Fairfax County this year. This reminds us that we should be more mindful of what we are buying – and what we are throwing away.

The EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy

Here's where it all begins – the Food Recovery Hierarchy. A little like the old USDA food pyramid, but turned on its head. How do we interact with this hierarchy? We're going to take a look at this from the perspective of a family of five living in Fairfax County. There's a mom and dad, a grandfather, a teenager, and a picky 6-year old. The mom does the grocery shopping and the dad does the cooking (with help from his family.) Let's see how the Fairfax Family navigates the Food Recovery Hierarchy in a typical week. The first principal is Source Reduction – reducing the volume of surplus food generated:



Source Reduction

Mom and Dad sit down to talk about what the upcoming week will look like. Who will be eating dinner at home this week? Is anyone buying lunch at school? What food is left over from last week? What does Dad feel like cooking? What's in the fridge/freezer? Do you have a running list of things you need? Answers to these questions will form the basis for a shopping list. Only buying what you need is the best way to reduce food waste.

The EPA estimates that we waste a lot of food – but it's not just overbuying. It's also often caused by the way food is packaged. You might be tempted to buy a giant bag of onions because it's a good deal. But watching those things sprout is an example of a missed opportunity. When we buy things that are packaged in large quantities, we often end up with waste. One way to avoid this – besides only buying what you need – is to chop up the onions and pop them in the freezer. You'll be happy to have some already chopped onions the next time you make soup, and you'll avoid the waste. Just make sure you label the container! The same is true of leftovers – if you pop them in the freezer, you will have dinner ready to go when you need it.

Feed Hungry People

Mom's company had a lunchtime meeting that was not well attended – even though the company sprang for lunch! What are they going to do with all that untouched food? Fortunately, mom has seen this happen before – she knows who to call. There are several organizations in Fairfax County that accept donations of catered food, so she is able to donate the lunches while they are still fresh.



CAPITAL AREA FOOD BANK
in Fairfax County, VA



HUNGER IS HERE.
In Virginia's Fairfax County, 58,480 residents struggle to get the food they need. Of those, 41% are children.

Food insecurity happens when people are so limited in their resources that they cannot afford to buy enough high-quality food to live a healthy life. This means that they may be running out of food, reducing the quality of their food, cutting out meat, feeding their children unbalanced meals, or skipping meals so that their children can eat.

Feed Animals

Your dog may ask you to feed him from the table, but that's not what we're talking about here. This is more about businesses that send food scraps to companies that make animal feed – mostly for agricultural purposes. Some grocery stores in the area send their food waste to animal-feed makers instead of composting, which is a higher use (see the hierarchy).

Industrial Uses

Grandpa made his delicious fried chicken for dinner, which he always fries in peanut oil. Yum! Of course, cleaning up is the hard part – what to do with the oil? Do we dump it down the drain? No! When we pour fats, oils, and grease down the drain, we are asking for trouble. Here's some [information](#) about how to manage cooking oils, fats, and grease. Fats and grease should be drained into a can, cooled, and placed in the trash.



Grandpa cools the oil and pours it into a lidded bucket. He brings it to the I-66 Transfer Station on West Ox Rd. The oil is poured into the larger receptacle – it will eventually be processed into a biofuel. Refined cooking oil is also used in the manufacture of soap, cosmetics, and animal feed. Grandpa will also take his family's bucket of food scraps to the drop-off site and recycle some wine bottles while he's there.

Composting

Composting is the controlled breakdown of organic material such as yard waste or food scraps. When Dad makes dinner, he puts potato peels, carrot tops, chicken bones, and all the other scraps into a countertop caddy with the coffee grounds and eggshells from breakfast. After dinner, whatever is left on the plates are scraped into the caddy. Paper napkins, food-soiled paper towels, and even shredded paper can also go into the compost caddy. It just takes a moment to think about where your waste should go – compost caddy, recycle bin, or trash can.



Composting is a sustainable alternative to disposal that puts the nutrients from our food scraps back into the soil. By using the finished compost as a fertilizer on local farms, lost nutrients are ultimately returned to our food system, the final step to completing a truly sustainable food cycle system.

When Grandpa takes the bucket of food scraps to the I-66 Transfer Station, he empties the contents into one of the *Compostables Only* carts. He gives it a good shake to get all the goo out, but he'll also give the bucket a good rinse when he gets home. Some people like to use compostable plastic bags to line their buckets, but Grandpa likes to use less plastic when he can.



Landfill/incineration

There are a few things that cannot be recycled or composted – they go into the trash. This includes certain kinds of plastic, paper towels that have a cleaning solution on them, tissues, diapers, juice pouches, plastic packaging, Styrofoam, and things like that. If it doesn't belong in your recycle bin, and it's not food waste, it's probably just trash. That's okay – Fairfax County will turn that trash into [energy!](#)

Food Scrap Composting Comes to Fairfax!

Fairfax County recently kicked off its new Food Scrap Composting Pilot Program with a ribbon cutting at both drop-off locations. The goal of this pilot program is to demonstrate how food scraps can be collected and made into high-quality compost. The drop-off locations are at the [I-95 Landfill Complex](#) and the [I-66 Transfer Station](#), and both locations are open from 7 am to 4 pm, seven days a week. The drop-off locations can be found behind the following sign:

lemon rinds ♪ pumpkins ♪ chicken thighs ♪ coffee filters ♪ cranberries ♪ turnips ♪ broccolini ♪ shrimp ♪ cookies ♪ liver ♪ paper napkins ♪ lobster ♪ sandwiches ♪ pizza ♪ apple cores ♪ food soiled paper ♪ brazil nuts ♪ grapefruit ♪ ice cream ♪

Food Scrap Composting





carrot tops ♪ banana peels ♪ tea bags ♪ coffee grounds ♪ bread ♪ brussels sprouts ♪ onions ♪ yogurt ♪ flowers ♪ chicken bones ♪ potatoes ♪ rice ♪ beans ♪ broccoli ♪ pickles ♪ fish bones ♪ parsnips ♪ shredded paper ♪ pork chops ♪ cupcakes ♪

lo mein ♪ tarts ♪ hotdog buns ♪ pistachio shells ♪ peas ♪

peas ♪ soranides ♪ shallots ♪ figs ♪ nutmeg ♪ eggshells ♪

Check out the [Compost Right](#) fact sheet for details about what can and can't be composted. Compostable items include food soiled paper napkins, paper towels, and cardboard food service items such as disposable plates, butcher paper, pizza boxes. Flowers and dead house plants are also acceptable.

There are a few guidelines in place to help produce the best-quality compost. Food scraps delivered to the drop-off locations must not include contaminants such as plastic bags, pet waste, or food wrappers. You can use a compostable liner to keep your container clean, or just plan to rinse it out when you get home. Some people like to keep their food waste in the fridge or freezer until they are ready to drop it off. This cuts way back on the “yuck” factor. If you bring your food scraps in plastic bags, please dispose of the bags as trash, rather than placing them in the compost carts.



At left, Mason District Supervisor Penny Gross demonstrates how to use the I66 food scrap drop-off location. At right, Recycling Division Director Eric Forbes discusses the new drop-off program with Mt. Vernon District Supervisor Dan Storck

Webinar: *How to Recycle Right in Fairfax County*

In celebration of Fairfax Recycles Day, Fairfax County's Employees for Environmental Excellence (FEEE) and the Solid Waste Management Program (SWMP) co-hosted a webinar titled *How to Recycle Right in Fairfax County* on Monday, November 16th. The webinar was an opportunity for county employees and residents to better understand the various market forces and technical reasons why some everyday items cannot be recycled at work or home.

The event was attended by more than 300 county employees, residents, and elected officials. Mt. Vernon District Supervisor, Dan Storck discussed the [Joint Environmental Taskforce](#) and its recommendation that the county set a “zero waste” goal for its operations, to be achieved by 2030. Supervisor Pat Herry also addressed participants, highlighting his support of the Fairfax Recycles Day proclamation.

The two panelists were Hans Christiansen, SWMP Director of Operations, and Greg Jansen, CEO of QRS Inc. and Re-Poly LLC and co-founder of Evertrak LLC, companies that convert recycled plastics into new products. Both agreed that “recycling right” is the key to successful, economically viable recycling. Mr. Christiansen discussed the items that are *always* recyclable, and the importance of getting that right. Wishful recycling – putting things into our recycling bins that might be recyclable is not helpful. In fact, it increases the cost of recycling. One of the problems that many residents run into is packaging that is not recyclable. Consumers can demand recyclable packaging from product manufacturers and Mr. Jansen encouraged residents to write to manufacturers to demand that they use recyclable plastics to make packaging that is truly recyclable.

Eric Forbes, SWMP’s Director of Recycling, Engineering, and Environmental Compliance, provided an overview of the regional glass recovery program, also known as the [Purple Can Club \(PCC\)](#) due to the color of the drop-off containers. The PCC is a regional partnership that has expanded to thirty-five drop-off locations in northern Virginia and has recovered over 8500 tons of glass for reuse and recycling. Some of the glass collected in the PCC is sent to glass processors that generate furnace ready cullet for true glass to glass recycling. Some of the glass is crushed at the I-95 Landfill Complex, where it is processed into gravel and sand that can be used as a substitute for quarried, virgin materials in construction applications.

To close the event, SWMP announced the launch of a food scrap drop-off pilot program. Drop-off locations at the [I66 Transfer Station and the I95 Landfill](#) are open between 7:00 am and 4:00 pm daily. Residents can collect [food scraps](#), including meat, fish, and bones, and drop them off at either location.

The [webinar recording](#) is now online. If you have any questions future webinars or require additional information about the county’s recycling and composting programs, please contact our Outreach & Education Team at 703.324.5230, TTY 711, or recycling@fairfaxcounty.gov.

To request this document in an alternate format, call 703-324-5230, TTY 711.



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<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/recycling-and-trash>

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