

Through volunteer-led education, the Composting Education Program diverts organic waste to support California's SB 1383.

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Introduction

Of the 39 million tons of waste sent to landfills in California in 2018, approximately one third of it was organic, compostable waste (CalRecycle). California's Senate Bill 1383 aims to tackle the immense issue of organic waste's pathway to landfills by reducing waste at the source, consumer, and collection levels. A large part of this goal includes composting residential and commercial organic waste that is unable to be eaten by humans or fed to animals. At the same time, national and local programs like California's Healthy Soils Initiative are working to combat soil degradation in the face of intensive land use and climate change. The Compost Education Program, based in Santa Clara County, has been employing small to medium-scale composting education to reduce waste and encourage healthy soils. Through volunteer-based education, the Compost Education Program (CEP) promotes waste reduction and healthy soils, supports resilient local food systems and increases awareness of environmental issues and sustainability. In the future, the program aims to continue to promote compost education with diverse community engagement and collaboration with city and county officers.

Outreach

The Composting Education Program provides many educational services for residents of Santa Clara County:

- Leading 40+ adult home composting workshops annually
- Teaching K-12 students about the benefits of composting and vermicomposting through presentations and hands-on demonstrations
- Tabling at community events
- Providing outreach materials on backyard composting, vermicomposting, and SB 1383 policies
- Supporting schools and other organizations in starting and maintaining on-site composting systems
- Operating the Rotline, a composting hotline for any and all questions about composting
- Developing and managing a community composting demonstration site with various types of small- to medium-scale composting systems for community members to visit



Methods

- Surveys sent to attendees three months after they attended a workshop. This survey included questions on how whether they are composting at home and how much materials – both food waste and yard trimmings – they are composting themselves.
- Using this data, we estimated the amount of organic waste being composted at home by all workshop attendees since 2015.
- Then, using calculations from a report on the landfills and composting facilities in Santa Clara County, we determined how much carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emissions were being saved from the diversion of that food waste.
- We used an emissions calculator developed by the EPA to determine an example to illustrate the amount of emissions saved – in our case, the emissions of gas-powered cars.

5300 residents

Over 5300 residents have learned how to compost at home at one of the 350 home composting workshops that the program held between 2015 and 2022.

7000 students

Master Composters have given 120 school presentations and demonstrations on the benefits of composting and vermicomposting, reaching over 7000 K-12 students

20,000+ contacts

The program has tabled at 155 community events, reaching tens of thousands of people in its community.

Results

- Based on a 3-month post-workshop survey, 82% of workshop attendees said they were composting at home after attending the workshop.
- Reducing food waste was the #1 reason why respondents were interested in learning about composting, followed by producing compost for garden use.
- Attendees reported composting 7723 tons of organic waste at home, including 918 tons of food waste.
- The 918 tons of food waste diverted from the landfill saved an estimated 333 metric tons of CO₂e emissions, which is the equivalent of taking 72 gas-powered cars off the road for an entire year.

