

THE GROWING HEAP

The Quarterly Newsletter of the COMMUNITY COMPOSTING NETWORK

Providing support, advice and information to Community Composters and would-be Community Composters throughout the UK

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Contact us at the office all day Tuesday and
via answerphone and fax at all other times.

Morter, is a volunteer at the CCN office here in Bristol.

Colinton Community Compost in Edinburgh were recently featured in their local press. Supported by the local Council, they plan to expand operations into an adjacent disused quarry and compost even more organic waste from the local community.

City Farm Byker in Newcastle upon Tyne have appointed Steve Tinling as the new Compost Education Worker. Congratulations Steve.

Richard Boden of **Wycycle** in Kent was recently interviewed on Radio 5 Live concerning the licence fees which prohibit community composters from selling their product. Pressure is on to change the legislation but in the meantime if you have problems with your local Environment Agency then call us at CCN and we will do our best to help.

Welcome to your second edition of The Growing Heap. As you will see - along with our membership - the newsletter is also growing. Interest in community composting has never been greater and we are receiving lots of calls from all over the country from groups wanting to start up community composting projects.

You will notice a new feature at the bottom of the newsletter. Blackwall Ltd of Leeds and Plysu Housewares Ltd of Bedford have agreed to sponsor the next 4 issues of The Growing Heap. Both Companies produce Compost Bins made with recycled plastics and we are pleased they want to be associated with the community composting movement, and look forward to their support in the future.

Thanks to all our new members for sending their £10 fee and to those who have forgotten, a reminder to fill in the application form on the adjoining sheet.

SPECIAL FEATURE: KEEPING COMPOSTING IN THE COMMUNITY by David Gray

The voluntary sector is well known for its work in recycling, but the extent to which it operates is typically misunderstood or undervalued. In composting this is very much the case and this article explains why a new organisation, the Community Composting Network (CCN) is being established.

The Environmental Action Fund (Department of the Environment) has supported the establishment of the Network which now employs a co-ordinator, Joe Moore. He is determined to see community composting given the credit it is

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Our youngest member We are delighted to announce the birth of Benedict on 12 October 1996, weighing 7lbs 13oz. His dad, Gary

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For more information
Tel: 0113 276 1646
Blackwall Ltd.
10 Glover Way,
Parkside, Leeds,
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Tel: 01234 841881
Wolsley Road, Kempston
Beds, MK42 7UD

due: "The first task will be to track down the hundreds of projects up and down the country and to catalogue the extent and nature of their work. Information sharing, problem solving and buddy systems will follow to meet the particular needs of groups."

The nature of the beast

Municipal or commercial composting operations are distinguished from community schemes by their size, rather than by any particular detail of the process. The driving force for municipal schemes is primarily economic, maintained by the opportunities to reduce landfill costs to disposal authorities rather than the value of an end product.

Community schemes are different. The financing is important but the process and product are paramount: environmental protection and practical sustainability are important motivations. The following checklist gives some idea of the typical characteristics found in community run schemes: small scale with minimal mechanisation; low cost/cost effectiveness; involvement of local people in bringing materials from kitchens and gardens; materials collected from householders and local businesses; home composting actively encouraged; education and awareness raising activities carried out; the end product sold locally or used to grow plants for the local community; projects financed by local, central or European government agencies, grants, sponsorship and contracts (including Recycling Credits); by-products promoted including heat, fishing worms, cleaner wheelie bins and improved urban soil fertility; jobs and training opportunities created including community enterprises.

Product development and the marketing of the compost produced is as eagerly pursued as are the opportunities for community enterprise and job creation. Improvements in the quality of the compost are being driven by the horticultural needs of the composting project and by the opportunities to sell a finished product to an eager local public. Its not surprising that some projects are seen as pilots for larger schemes to follow.

The sustainability thing

It is by participating that people learn. The great environmental challenge in the 1990s is to square the circle of sustainability; that elusive concept that means so little to so many. Change the aspirations of individuals and society such that

behaviour that protects the environment becomes synonymous with an improving quality of life and people can start to see where this overused term might be leading us.

The Government's proposed waste management strategy, *Making Waste Work*, acknowledge the 'invaluable contribution' of the educational promotional and awareness-raising work of the voluntary sector.

When the voluntary sector takes on a task it is well known that other benefits will start to flow. Community projects are showing how the bold demands of sustainability and the drive for Local Agenda 21 can actually be put into practice. Whilst local authorities and central government struggle with indicators of sustainable development and produce reports and leaflets about sustainability, they never seem to get to grips with the task of making it work in practice and thereby engaging people in the process. Here, in the world of the compost heap, this is happening. People are involved in recycling rather than simply disposing of unwanted waste. They can see a useful product being produced and are frequently happy to pay to get some back. At a deeper level, people are being reconnected with the land; picking up at least a basic understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy soil. Organic gardening is, not surprisingly, a common theme in community composting projects.

Making it pay

Whilst funding can include similar sources used by the municipal or commercial schemes, many community composting projects don't secure adequate levels of funding and often have difficulty in obtaining any help with running costs apart from some recycling credits.

Richard Boden of Wyecycle, the much acclaimed project which collects organic waste from 700 households in Kent bemoans the unfairness of the system: "We receive £1.79 per tonne by way of Collection Credits whilst local private contractors may be charging the authority up to £15 per tonne for the same material." He has long called for a level playing field and strongly believes that the community sector can compete effectively with the big players. "I dislike the term voluntary, we run a community business and a highly efficient one at that, if the economics weren't stacked against us there would be a lot more community composting going on."

Centralised, source separated schemes involve large transport costs and frequently don't have a local market for their end product."

If the Government were to acknowledge that Richard is right in his assertions, it could open up a big debate on value for money. A great deal of UK and European taxpayers money is being channelled into large composting projects when some highly cost effective ways could also be available.

Who's doing it?

Examples of community composting are very diverse indeed. They include a county-wide support network of smaller composting projects in a rural area, a single person operating a local scheme as an independent, self-employed enterprise and a project where home composter sales support an advisory service to home owners and gardeners. The City Farm movement has been involved in almost all the models for local composting now for over 20 years and many allotment gardeners group together informally to create highly successful results. Nobody actually knows how many projects are out there. The CCN doesn't know yet, but in all its forms it probably runs into many hundreds.

The potential for more projects to start also exists although the barriers to starting up are many fold and notably include the initial equipment costs and uncertainty about the legal requirements.

The DoE must now play a part: clearer guidance to the Environment Agency about community composting and even some legal changes to give exemption from the licensing laws designed for large-scale schemes are urgently needed.

The need for a national Community Recycling Network

The level of know-how, hard science, experience and management required to run a successful composting project is substantial - not to mention the law relating to waste regulations.

The Community Composting Network will provide accessible practical information, of social, legal and logistical as well as a purely biotechnical nature. It will lobby for legal changes, help to secure funds for research and promote community composting in all its forms.

Conclusion

In summary, community composting is people centred - reinforcing the links between recycling and environmental benefits. The larger, commercial and municipal schemes should take note: they are at risk of separating the process from the people except for well meaning leaflets and up-beat press launches. Centralised schemes have economies of scale but does centralisation always make sense? Do such schemes make sense in terms of energy use and capital investment? Are they responding to a market or trying to find one? Are they truly environmentally sustainable?

Recycling Expertise, Waste Watch's national hot-line support service has seen requests from community composting projects increase by 1000% in the last year alone. The government has set a target to encourage 40% of domestic properties with a garden to carry out home composting by the year 2000. Might it need some help too?

End Note

"I bequeath myself to the dirt, to grow from the grass I love: if you want me again, look for me under your boot-soles." American poet Walt Whitman, 1819-1892.

David Gray is the Development Officer at Heeley City Farm, Richards Road, Sheffield S2 3DT. He also runs an EAF-funded community composting scheme in central Sheffield. Tel 0115 258 0482; email heeleyfarm@gn.apc.org.

This article first appeared in "Composting News", the quarterly newsletter of the Composting Association.

LOGO CONTEST

We are keeping the "Design a CCN logo" Competition open until January 1st, so get your pencils out and get drawing. The winner will receive 1 years free membership and a bag of Windmill Hill Community Compost.

COMMUNITY COMPOSTING MANUAL

CCN have been working with Land Care Associates to develop a new guide to Community

Composting by the Wildlife Trust Peat Free campaign.

They hope to launch this at our planned May Conference along with our Directory of Community Composters (see attached questionnaire).

GET STUCK ON

Here is the design proposal (1/4 size) for CCN bag labels to be printed on rough brown recycled paper and stapled to bag. If you have any ideas for changes or improvements, please send them in.

own logo
own name

COMMUNITY COMPOST
A TRULY SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT

This compost is made solely from locally produced organic materials. By using this compost you will be:

- * Diverting waste from landfill where it pollutes our soil and water
- * Building up long term soil structure and fertility
- * Preserving fragile natural environments i.e. peat bogs
- * Reducing tax payers expenditure on waste collection and disposal
- * Creating local employment

MEMBER OF THE
COMMUNITY COMPOSTING NETWORK
Membership No. _____

CCN LOGO

For practical help and advice on starting a community composting scheme, contact:
THE COMMUNITY COMPOSTING NETWORK
THE GREENHOUSE
HEREFORD STREET
BEDMINSTER
BRISTOL
BS3 4NA
Tel/Fax 0117 907 7875

PROJECT NEWS

The first community composting scheme in South Gloucestershire is now up and running in Patchway. After years in the pipeline this project finally came to fruition this year through the efforts of the Patchway Recycling Group who put forward a development plan (supported by South Gloucestershire Council - SGC) to Patchway Parish Council. Ken Orchard of the Devon Community Composting Initiative designed the composting units while SGC provided the use of the shredder for the woodier material. The scheme works well as it has the support of several local groups - the Patchway Recycling Group, the Patchway Conservation Group, the Patchway Garden Society and the users of the allotments on which the scheme is sited.

The public bring their coarse garden waste to a storage bay outside the allotments. This is then sorted for shredding, removing any unsuitable waste (e.g. irons!) and transferred to the first of four composting units. This is turned into the next unit after 3 months and replaced with new green waste from the storage bay. The compost is moved along the units until it is ready to be used.

The public response has been gratifying with so much green waste left in the storage bay that some has had to be taken to another composting site nearby. Apart from producing great compost for local gardeners, the scheme helps to tackle the considerable problem of fly-tipping which is widespread in the Patchway area and which the Patchway Conservation Group spend a great deal of time clearing up.

Patchway Recycling Group is part of the Waste Reduction in the Community project run in Bristol and South Gloucestershire by the Bristol Recycling Consortium. More information from Phil Collett/Manda Brookman at the Create Centre, Smeaton Road, Bristol BS1 6XN. Tel 0117 930 4377 Fax 0117 929 7283

The CCN would like to acknowledge the funding provided by the Department of the Environment's Environmental Action Fund towards the Network. We are in the process of matching this and welcome fundraising sources and ideas.