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Distributing the compost

The methods used to distribute finished compost vary between existing projects. Some projects such as allotment sites or farms use the compost on site. Volunteers working on other projects are allowed to take the compost for their own use, or it may be returned to Compost Club members free of charge. Other groups sell the compost through local outlets, for cash, local currency or a mixture of the two.

Selling compost helps to raise the profile of the project – but it should not be relied upon as a major source of funding. Treat the income as a bonus. If you are intending to sell compost, some good market research is required. You also need to be able to produce a regular, good quality supply, especially if it is going for sale in a garden centre or similar outlet.

Potential markets

- Members of the scheme
- Donors of raw materials
- Allotment societies and garden clubs
- Local shops
- Local nurseries and garden centres
- Landscape gardeners and environmental groups
- Local authorities
- Local residents

Encourage landscapers to use your compost and promote it to local allotment sites and garden clubs. Environmental groups may also be interested in using composted green waste in their work. At the Seagull project in Skegness the compost has been used by their local authority and was specified by the Groundwork Trust in one of their local projects. Selling your product loose, in bulk, avoids the need for bagging, promotes the scheme to a wider section of the community and distributes larger quantities of finished compost. By both promoting the scheme to more potential contributors of raw materials and increasing use of the end product, you will help to ensure a continuous turnover of material.

Selling the compost

If in the course of your planning you have decided to sell the end product of your labours you will need to determine a marketing strategy

Marketing points to consider

- Similar products available, their cost and quality
- Potential local markets
- Product price

- Quantity and quality of the products which can be produced
- Seasonal variations in supply
- Packaging and presentation

It may be possible to sell direct from the site, having people collect supplies as required. If further markets are desired it will be necessary to persuade managers of local shops and garden centres to stock your compost.

You will need to set up a meeting to discuss the scheme and to decide quantities and price. It is a good idea to invite prospective stockists to visit the site and view operations. Pricing of similar products already on the market will give some idea what to charge (see also *Grants and Other Funding*).

LETS

Compost can be sold through LETS (Local Exchange Trading Systems), in which case no actual money changes hands. Compost is swapped for the ability to obtain services or goods, using the local currency. These schemes can be quite large. The 'virtual' income raised could be used to buy in labour, specialist skills, wood for compost bins and so on. Details of local LETS groups are available from LETSLINK UK.

Packaging and labelling

Depending on your market, you may decide to package your products in attractive, smart, clean bags. Bear this in mind when setting the price of your goods. The cost of specially printed bags is very high. It is much cheaper to buy plain sacks and either write on them or use CCN labels. These can have your own logo printed on them and can be stapled to the sacks.

Alternatively, it may be more appropriate to exploit the environmentally-friendly image which recycling used bags will give. Many schemes distribute their finished compost in re-used feed or fertiliser bags turned inside out and tied at the top. These can be returned for re-use. Small quantities can go in plastic carrier bags.

What to include on labels

Labels should give as much information as possible about the product without becoming cluttered and unintelligible.

- Producers' details
- Your logo
- What raw materials it contains
- What it can be used for eg mulch, potting mix etc
- Any relevant test results

For more information on labels and labelling, see *The End Product*

Recycling credits

To claim recycling credits it is necessary to have an accurate account of how much material has been processed. Bagging the compost allows the opportunity for records to be kept on how much is being produced. This can either be recorded by weight or volume. Volume is the simplest and can be calculated using a bucket. Weight is influenced by moisture content, so it can be highly variable. Weighing also requires the use of scales which is an extra expense.

Unbagged material can still be recorded by weighing in bulk and the value of offering it loose should not be ignored, for selling in bulk to landscapers, local authorities etc, or by distribution by the barrow load to allotment holders. Your target market will dictate which you do.

Product testing

See *The End Product*.

Other relevant sections

- Public Relations and Marketing
- Planning the Enterprise
- Grants and Other Funding
- The End Product