

One man's trash ...

Rosenhayn company taking the lead in organic recycling

By Lauren T. Taniguchi
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DEERFIELD TWP. — At F&S Produce Co., Inc. in Rosenhayn, trash is turned to treasure thanks to a compost operation that recycled approximately 30 million pounds of vegetative waste into soil-enriching organic material last year.

By utilizing vegetable and fruit peels, cores, seeds, scraps and material with decay, the company saves money while cultivating wheat, corn, soybean and other vegetable crops through a green, sustainable practice.

"The use of organic compost in farming is well-known. Dumping items into landfills is wasteful of landfill space and costly," said Douglas Nicoll, PhD, technical services director at F&S Produce. "Farmers have been interested in using the fruit and vegetable scraps to supplement their soils since the beginning of the company in 1980s."

Nicoll explained that sorted waste product is collected at F&S by conveyors and placed into 30-yard waste containers. These containers are collected at least once a day and dumped into the field currently being enriched.

"At the end of the day, a work crew spreads the scraps, and a moldboard-type plow works the scraps into the soil," Nicoll said. "The process to cover a field depends on field size but typically takes about a month. Breakdown of the materials into nutrients

occurs over a period of months."

In total, the composted waste from F&S is used to enrich approximately 500 acres of farmland, and spreading over various fields in the surrounding communities is done on a three-year, rotating basis.

Nicoll did acknowledge that the issue of smell presents itself "from time to time," usually associated with weather that prevents workers from getting into the fields. However, F&S follows a set of rules as part of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) permitting process, and the company has reduced odor issues by changing the method of plowing into the fields "from disk-type plows to the moldboard plows, which more effectively bury the scraps," according to Nicoll.

"We also try to utilize fields closer to housing in the colder months when people aren't spending a great deal of time outdoors," Nicoll added, pointing out that other farmer practices such as manure-spreading can also produce strong odors.

"Odors and fly attraction are quickly reduced once the vegetative scraps are plowed under," he said. "...F&S Produce makes every attempt to be a good neighbor in the community."

The company that handles the waste operation, Organic Land Developers, is a partnership of family members paid by the weight of material

that is handled in order to cover expenses of equipment, fuel and directly related labor, Nicoll said, noting that the rate paid in support of this compost operation is substantially less than the landfill tipping fees.

"The decreased cost of waste removal benefits the F&S Produce operation and helps make the company competitive to other fresh-cut processors that don't have this option," said Nicoll. "The operation, in conjunction with other recycling, helps the sustainability of the operation."

F&S Produce also recycles other materials such as cardboard for general paper recycling and waxed cardboard into fire-place logs.

In addition to recycling waste materials, Nicoll said the farming operation at F&S Produce maintains a soil conservation plan in conjunction with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). He emphasized that the company's composting practices reduce the need for the addition of fertilizers and other soil nutrients while taking advantage of organic materials that would otherwise be taken to the sanitary landfill at a greater expense.

Nicoll noted that composting practices utilized on other local fields also include a large national coffee company's distribution of grinds in area farming soils, as well as the



Staff photos by Cathy Cramer/The News of Cumberland County
Sam Pipitone III of F&S Produce Co., Inc. explains how they spread the fruit and vegetable scraps onto the fields, plow it into a natural compost before they plant and the results are good.

spreading of cranberry, soy and dairy waste products — a plus for both crop producers and the planet.

"Anything that can en-

rich soils and reduce the need for chemical fertilizers is a benefit to farmers and to the environment," said Nicoll.

Contact Lauren T. Taniguchi at 856-451-1000, ext. 519 or ltaniguchi@southjerseymedia.com.