



Making Composting Accessible

Eve Bratman & Antonia Hinnenkamp

WHO

Who was involved?

We are around 300 community members participating in a city-wide composting co-operative, with each of our current 5 bins located in public spaces across the city (New Holland Ave Recycling Facility, Musser Park, Buchanan Park, Culliton Park, and Linear Park). Two more bins are awaiting placement this summer and we have more plans in the works for expansion. Our core team of leadership includes 12 compost captains, administrative volunteers, and works in close partnership with the City of Lancaster staff. We've been well supported also by the Penn Extension Master Gardeners, and collaborated with Blackbirds Environmental Justice, Lemon Street Market, Lancaster Science Factory, and other local businesses and community groups.

The Compost Co Op is free and open to all; members must only attend a training session, sign a membership form, and agree to contribute occasional volunteering time toward maintaining the health of the compost bin. We aim to make composting accessible to everyone in Lancaster, especially those without backyard space or the skillsets involved in producing this nutrient-rich soil amendment that simultaneously reduces organic waste.

WHAT

The initiative began as a pilot project in 2021, with \$11,000 in seed grant funding from CSEwL to establish what we at first thought would be six bins in the City of Lancaster. But the price of lumber skyrocketed in the pandemic, and the initial pilot was drastically scaled down. But it was successful on a number of levels, nevertheless: we have subsequently grown from two bins to five in operation today, and by the end of this summer we will have seven bins in the City, and hopefully quite a few more on the way, pending successful grant applications.

We have an active website and social media (700+ followers on Instagram), completed a program evaluation for our first year, and have a scholarly publication that is currently under review with a sustainability journal. We have also consulted

with other groups to share the model, including locally in York County and as far away as the New Mexico Compost Coalition. We presented about our work last year at a Professional Recyclers and Organics Professionals conference as well. And our co-op members have participated in dozens of community work socials, and our first-annual Compost Summit and potluck dinner happened this spring, which was hosted at F&M.

It is our mission to make composting accessible to every resident of Lancaster. We aim to create high quality compost, which will yield social, economic, and environmental benefits for all Lancaster's residents.

We've learned that beyond the physical work of producing compost, which of course is awesome in and of itself because it helps address climate change, reduces waste, yields a cost-savings to the City from waste reduction, returns net-positive benefits to the soil - that this is really more about people than anything else. We are fostering community, because having these bins in public places becomes a meeting point where people share a common interest and work together toward making composting successful. A book club spawned from our initiative, and kids educational programming, as well as a mushroom-compost workshop and a lot of meaningful friendships and strengthening of neighborhood social networks. The light physical activity involved in the work of turning compost piles and the sense of purpose from working together are all part of the keys to what we think is more about regenerative urbanism than sustainability - a net-positive, quality of life-enhancing set of social and ecological interventions. In short: composting feels good, but composting in community is FUN.

The initiative would not have been possible without the seed grant money from CSEwL.



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ACHIEVEMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

Our visions for the future include: Placing bins at appropriate locations within walking distance for all Lancasterians; reflecting the full diversity of Lancaster's residents; inspiring urban sustainability initiatives in other cities; making composting and organics separation more widespread, and advocating for policies and programs to expand composting, promote food recovery, and reduce waste.

We are actively in conversation with SACA (Spanish American Civic Association), about placing bins near their facilities, and helping to improve the geographic and demographic diversity of the initiative by expanding more into Southeast Lancaster.

We also want to link up public health and educational initiatives with the issue of food waste, and are trying to draw out those connections further through our latest grant applications.