

From food waste to farm vegetables Recycling program at Bend's Old Mill easy for restaurants, good for farmers

By Kate Ramsayer / *The Bulletin*

Published: December 13, 2010 4:00AM PST

More than a year after three restaurants in Bend's Old Mill District started collecting food waste so that Fields Farm could turn it into fertilizer, the restaurants are still sending off compost material by the bucket-ful.

And the Old Mill is hoping to add more restaurants to the composting effort in 2011, said Noelle Fredland, Old Mill marketing manager.

"We're very much looking forward to having the program expand," she said.

Currently, Café Yumm!, Pastini Pasteria and Strictly Organic Coffee Co. are participating. Employees put food waste and coffee grounds in 5-gallon buckets, and empty the buckets into a larger bin by the recycling and trash receptacles. Twice a week, someone from Bend's Fields Farm picks up the material and takes it back to the farm where it is composted and turned into a fertilizer, which helps grow the vegetables sold at local farmers markets.

"We're always looking for new and different ways to push sustainability," Fredland said, "And it's an important thing for us to do as a community, and it's an important thing for us to do as a business."

At Café Yumm!, workers take the ends of zucchini, onion skins, pits and skins of avocados and more, and toss them into four buckets they have in the prep area, said Karli Foster, co-owner and general manager of the restaurant.

"As we're making food to order and when tickets come through, we can put that compost right there," she said.

It wasn't hard to make the switch to throwing scraps into the compost buckets, she said — workers were already used to sorting out recycling and other materials. And as a green-minded restaurant, it meshed with the company's philosophy, she said.

"It's been fantastic," she said. "The busier we are, the more we see we're composting."



Photos by Andy Tullis / The Bulletin

Karli Foster, co-owner and general manager of Café Yumm! in the Old Mill District, tosses lettuce scraps into a bucket containing food waste. The restaurant has several buckets around its kitchen, and every week someone from Fields Farm in Bend collects the waste for composting. It is later turned into fertilizer.

Because so much material is composted, the restaurant only has to have a garbage pickup once a week, instead of two or three times, she said.

"We really don't have a lot of garbage," Foster said.

Strictly Organic has sent coffee grounds to Fields Farm for years, said Rhonda Ealy, co-owner of the coffee shop.

'A way of life'

"Composting and reusing and recycling as much as we possibly can — that's a way of life for us and always has been," she said.

But with the Old Mill program, the management company took the lead and organized the effort, Ealy said, making it easy for the restaurant to participate.

"It's a great program," she said, noting that the Old Mill store fills two or three 5-gallon buckets a day, just with coffee grounds.

Jim Fields, owner of Fields Farm, said he's also happy with the way the program has gone.

He composts the food waste and coffee grounds with horse manure and other material to create a fertilizer that he uses to grow vegetables on his Bend farm. The compost mixture can bump up the organic matter in the soil from between 1 and 2 percent to 5 percent, he said.

Most organic farms don't make their own compost, Fields said, since doing so is almost like an additional operation that farmers have to manage.

"It's so much more expensive and time consuming," he said.

But the mix of material — coffee grounds from all over the world, vegetable scraps from different regions and other material like hops — adds different elements to the fertilizer, he said.

Making compost with waste from area restaurants keeps things local, and uses resources from Central Oregon, he said.

"We really like this low-energy lifestyle," he said.

Educating employees

The biggest challenge in the program has been making sure employees know what goes in the compost bin, Fredland said.

A busy summer followed by the hectic holiday season has slowed the process of other restaurants joining the program, she said, and



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Karli Foster, of Café Yumm!, says it wasn't hard to get kitchen staff to throw food scraps into the compost buckets. The green-minded restaurant was already

other businesses such as Greg's Grill and Anthony's have separate programs for food recycling.

But she said she would like to get other restaurants, including the new Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches, on board in January.

Craig McCollum, co-owner of Jimmy John's, said the restaurant already donates good food it can no longer use to a shelter, but would be open to the composting program for food waste.

Fredland said she hopes the program continues.

"It's definitely a winning proposition for everyone," Fredland said. "It reduces our overall waste, helps out Fields Farm, (and) it reduces the cost of our trash."

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sorting out recycling materials.



Employees collect food scraps, seen here, at Café Yumm! in 5-gallon buckets, and the food is turned into compost at a local farm.

Published Daily in Bend Oregon by Western Communications, Inc. © 2010

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