Food Recycling – Composting Organic Waste

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WKU has been recycling food waste since the 1980’s at the university farm, through a partnership with the city of Bowling Green.

But a recent grant has expanded food recycling to the Baker Arboretum as Amy Bingham explains in this week’s View from the Hill.

Once again WKU is leading the way in sustainability practices, going from composting two thousand pounds of solid waste in a month to 1400 pounds in a day. It’s all because of an impressive machine known as a COW.

“This thing can handle up to 500 pounds of waste per day, It’s amazing.”

This “thing” is called a COW, which stands for composting organic waste.

It’s the brain child of Brian Poitras who works for CGS Machine & Tool.

“The bottom line is we’re gonna save the environment, that’s what I’m trying to do. I just love working with compost.”

Whether it’s coffee grounds from Starbucks, or food leftover from Subway and DSU, it is brought here to the Baker Arboretum five times a week for composting.

“It basically takes waste from all the facilities at Western and combined with card board creates a beautiful compost that you can use around your trees or anything.”

The custom-built, locally manufactured in-vessel digester was made possible through a grant.

“The Kentucky Pride composting grant was to fund projects to expand existing composting operations so we expanded from the one location to include all 15 dining locations on campus.”

The Baker Arboretum was more then willing to get in on this partnership.

“We’re in the business of compost and wood chips and so it works for us really well. We have a ready source of material from which to build landscape beds and we have built landscape beds from them.”

And other universities are expressing interest in getting a COW on their own campuses, following WKU’s lead in reducing their solid waste bill.

“That waste could be going to a landfill or somewhere else but it’s coming in here and making good compost.”

Throughout the summer, pre-consumer food waste is being picked up from Starbucks, DSU, Chili’s, Subway, and Catering. This fall it will be picked up from all fifteen of WKU’s dining locations.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

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