

# Compost Company Promotes Green Environment

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By Valerie Van Kooten. Edited by Christina Fisher.  
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**Diverting organic material from the landfill to a recycling facility helps preserve and protect the environment — and adds to the bottom line.**

On average, Americans waste 25 percent of the food they prepare. They throw away 44 percent of their yard trimmings and 90 percent of their wood waste. But Chesterfield Farms, LLC is working to put a green edge on those statistics with its organic recycling.

Located between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, this six-acre compost facility was opened by Alan Boehm in July 2004. The site of a former wood waste facility, the area required extensive cleaning before the first materials could be accepted on the site. During this time, a new screening plant and accompanying implements were purchased and the site was graded and paved.

Chesterfield Farms is a supplier of ECOsoils™ growing media for planting, green roof applications and bio-retention purposes. The company also produces horticultural grade amendments such as topsoil and compost. They also sell double-shredded hardwood bark mulch. The company accepts yard debris and trimmings, brush, grass clippings, and limbs up to 8 inches in diameter from municipal contracts, private contractors and landscape contractors.

"We also accept food residuals, much of which comes from large product suppliers; however, we do accept some residuals from grocery stores, universities and hotels," says Boehm. "We will also accept small amounts of horse manure and clean, unused drywall." Other interested parties include coffee roasteries, micro breweries, floral vendors, hospitals, assisted living facilities, and schools.

Once the materials arrive on-site, the trucks are weighed in and out for billing and data management. Inbound products are ground on the day they arrive and are blended to achieve a 30-to-1 carbon-to-nitrogen ratio. Materials are then placed in a large windrow, and daily temperature readings ensure the internal temperature of the windrow.

"Windrows are turned and watered routinely to control temperature, moisture and oxygen to achieve accelerated decomposition and to allow the finished material to fully stabilize and mature through a curing process," Boehm says.

The materials are routinely tested both through internal measures and from an independent laboratory for specific lab analyses. The process of composting takes 90 days to 120 days in static aerated windrows and less time when forced into long silage bags.

The final product is sold to landscape professionals, architects, community gardens, contractors, garden centers, and state and local governments. "We sell blended materials for local nurseries and to storm water management stabilization projects to prevent runoff," Boehm says. "Our compost is blended with lightweight aggregates and other materials on-site for purchase by landscape architects and developers for green roof installations."

Incoming product and overall sales have doubled each year since the company was founded three years ago. "We process 300 tons per week, or 60 tons to 100 tons per day," Boehm says.

Chesterfield Farms uses a Vermeer® HG6000 horizontal grinder to grind the initial material. "Depending on the time of the year, the grinder runs between two and eight hours a day, five to six days a week, or approximately 1,000 hours per year," Boehm says, adding that they use three different screens — a 2-inch square baffle, a 4-inch square step and a 5-inch round. "The grinder plays a very key role in our operation, and we are very pleased with its performance."

In addition to the HG6000 grinder, Chesterfield Farms owns four loaders, one excavator, three screening plants, and one windrow turner.

With growing concern over the environment and a national drive to go green, Boehm sees some trends emerging in the movement. "There will be a stronger emphasis in all areas of recycling to divert these materials away from the landfill," he says. "Compostables are one of the final frontiers of the recycling process, and the East Coast of the United States is a driving force."

Boehm says there is plenty of room in this industry for both public and private contractors to become involved in recycling. "As a greater emphasis is placed on the environment, compost amendments will gain interest over commercial-based products for gardens, lawn care, landscaping, and even golfscapes," he says. "Cityscapes will have increased emphasis in greening their parks and rooftops. Recycling storm water and seeking ways for the workplace and public institutions to become more energy efficient will also become more essential."

Many avenues are open to someone wanting to get involved in the industry. Boehm recommends partnering with industry organizations like the U.S. Composting Council (USCC), Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA), and other state and regional associations. "Municipalities have key people involved in environmental research and composting," Boehm says. "These individuals are valuable and readily accessible to provide assistance and training."

Boehm points to master gardeners at the local level and state extension services as good places to start. "After your facility is open, be willing to host tours to those in the industry or organizations with an emphasis in recycling," he says. "Individuals who have an interest in recycling or the industry will understand if you are just getting started."

Boehm says he has hosted almost 20 tours at his facility, ranging from the Maryland Department of the Environment, the World Bank, and Whole Foods Market to Maryland Hospitals for a Healthy Environment and Maryland Master Gardeners. "Stay at the forefront of your industry's education efforts, and put in place a manufacturing plant that will not let you down," he says. "Build a team of people that genuinely want to invest their lives in your business and involve them in the successes that are achieved in such a way that they capture a vision for what can be."

Boehm says Chesterfield Farms is the best at what it does because of their meticulous selection and qualification of the materials, making sure that all incoming materials are clean and contaminant free. "We routinely test our products to ensure that the compost we sell is stable and mature," he says. "We will not sell our materials before they are ready and until they meet the job specifications. Our products stand apart from the competition in quality and consistency."

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