lem. "Food waste is more difficult to compost than yard waste," Donahue says. "Revisions would need to be made to the current rules and regulations before a citywide program could be initiated."

Until a program can be established, the city supports the efforts of grassroots programs such as the composting demos and classes given by the OSU Extension Service, the coffee grounds diversion programs, the Sustainable Disposal at Eugene Schools project and the composting done at community gardens.

There are currently around six community gardens in Eugene. One of the largest gardens is the Skinner City Farm (SCF), which has 18 individual plots and six nonprofit plots. The SCF was established in 1998 by Eugene Parks Planning and a core group of naturalists and urban farmers.

Jan Vandertuin, who initially helped develop and now helps run the garden, is proud and encouraged by the work they are doing. "The garden is a completely citizen-driven project that provides food for the community and revamps the infrastructure of the city," says Vandertuin.

The most exciting part, he believes, is getting the community and government working together in a project that helps to build a stronger bond between the two infrastructures. SCF has expanded its eco-friendly relationships even further to involve restaurants and youth.

In 2004, with the help of volunteers and students from the Center for Appropriate Transport (CAT), SCF built a large wooden worm bin at its site. The volunteers formed relationships with local restaurants and food producers to allow them to pick up coffee grounds and kitchen waste once a week. The waste is then fed to the worms to make compost, which is later applied to the garden plots.

"We use our CAT bikes to pick up the waste. About 20 to 25 five-gallon buckets are picked up per week," Vandertuin says. "We don't charge the restaurants anything to take their food waste, and we even provide them with the buckets they need to hold the material." But it's great for the gardens, he says. "Coffee grounds in particular are really good for the compost — the worms love it!"

Catherine Reinhart from Sweet Life bakery says the staff members were happy when CAT approached them and asked if they wanted to compost. "Our establishment believes in sustainable living, and this is just one more step in being more environmentally friendly. CAT makes it so easy for us because they are consistent in their pick up and come often."

But the composting process hasn't been without some trouble. "At first it was a pain because we were tight on space, and we had to create a separate area just for the compost buckets," says Reinhart. "But after finding space and training the employees, it has become as simple as recycling."

Laughing Planet employee Jeremy Deguc believes that a lot of restaurants in town don't compost because of lack of awareness and because it takes some work to get established. "Separating the food waste can be messy. It attracts flies and may smell," Deguc says. "It is difficult because the city doesn't have a composting program available to restaurants, so we have to do it on our own. I just appreciate the soldiers in town that have helped my establishment learn to compost."

SCF in partnership with CAT has also gotten youth involved in composting. The Skinner City Farm Youth Education Program is an agriculturally based program for youth 12 to 19. The lessons are all hands-on and teach a variety of subjects, but one in particular is sustainable practices. At SCF, the students helped to build and design the onsite compost bin as well as learn all about the process of composting.

CAT student Nolan Chase, 16, started going to the Network Charter school in the 7th grade. He used a computer program at CAT that helped him design part of the compost bin. "I learned a lot about composting from the program, and the importance of recycling from a community standpoint. I was taught that farming and gardening take the nutrition out of the soil, and compost material helps give some of that nutrition back." He says that there were times when he thought he would rather be doing anything else than the hard physical labor required of him, but in the end he is glad to have those skills.

Other schools in Eugene are also being educated on sustainable living. In 2000, the city of Eugene was awarded a grant from the EPA's Sustainable Development Challenge Grant program that could be used towards installing onsite composting at several Eugene schools. The Eugene schools project installed Earth Tubs, a large in-vessel composting unit capable of processing cafeteria food discards, at six Eugene schools. The teachers and students were shown how to separate, transport, process, test and eventually utilize the food scraps that were previously a wasted resource (and headed for the landfill).

Five of the six Earth Tub schools compost everything: meat products, paper napkins, paper condiment cups and fruits and vegetables. Milk is excluded in all cases because of the likelihood that milk in the tub would cause odor problems. One school has chosen not to add meat products to their tub even though the tubs are capable of handling up to 10 percent meat products.

It took each school a couple of trial runs before learning which sorting system worked best for them. At Kelly Middle School, the custodian created an efficient sort station that allows for the recycling of paper, food waste, milk cartons, cans and juice containers. The lunchroom custodian oversees the recycling station. Patterson Elementary School focused on food waste and milk carton recycling. Students take turns overseeing the sort line, with older students providing help and encouragement to the younger students. Sort buckets are elevated so students can easily place food and milk cartons into their proper containers.

The Oregon State University Extension Service went into the schools and talked to the students about the benefits of composting. Cindy Wise, compost specialist volunteer coordinator with the Lane County office of the Extension Service, believes that the best way to judge the level of compost awareness is to talk to kids. "Ten years ago none of the kids in the schools knew what composting was; today when you go into schools over half of the students not only know what composting is but are composting in their homes. That is very encouraging."

The Extension Service runs a composting program sponsored by the city, an outreach educational program to reduce landfill waste. The service gives 10 free composting demos each year; compost specialists walk people through composting basics, common problems and how to choose a compost bin that fits their individual needs.

"There has been a large interest in composting from gardeners in particular. The last demo we gave had over 100 attendees," Wise says. "I have seen the landfill and recycling conditions in other countries and states, and the people of Lane County should feel proud and lucky to have the services offered here."

For those people who are wanting a little more tutelage on the topic, OSU offers a Master Composter course. The program is open to anyone interested in composting, and it is free in exchange for 20 hours of volunteer work. The program has had attendees from Albany, Corvallis and even Portland.

Eugene resident Dave Kafis, who wears a "Mr. Worm" hat, took the Master Gardening/Composter class in 2001. He has since composted for FOOD for Lane County, the River House community garden and grocery stores around town. He has his own garden plot at River House, and he is in charge of all of its community plots. Using his own truck, he picks up waste from Market of Choice every morning and coffee grounds from several coffee places around town. He ends up with about 6,000 pounds of veggie waste a month and 1,000 pounds of coffee grounds, which all gets composted and eventually added to the gardens.

"It feels good to make something beneficial out of waste that would normally just be thrown away. Not only that, but using the compost here in our own community gardens keeps it all local," Kafis explains. "The whole process is a continuous cycle of putting back into the soil what you take."

He recommends that everyone try composting, whether they have a garden or not. "It is easy to compost and really not that time consuming. I recommend that people who want to recycle but don't have a place to compost it try a worm bin. It doesn't take up much space, is really clean and you don't have to spend much time on it because the worms do all the work. A neighbor, local farm or one of the community gardens would be more than happy to

TYPES OF BINS

Worm Bins – Worm composting is unique because it uses food scraps only and no yard waste. It is ideal for people with very small yards or no yard. Worm composting bins can be made in any size or can be purchased. A successful worm bin will not smell, can be harvested every few months and can be kept indoors or outdoors.

Heaps – This is the cheapest form of composting and is great if you have a moderate to large area to locate your heap. This system can be problematic if there are animals like raccoons, deer or dogs that are likely to scavenge the pile. A heap or open pile should be covered in the rainy season.

Hoops – This type of bin is inexpensive and can be made out of wire and stakes or bought as an adjustable plastic enclosure, with or without a lid. Hoops are enclosed and are tidier than a heap and can be moved and covered easily but are generally not animal resistant. Some hoops are adjustable.

In-vessel – Composting takes place inside a building or a container with forced aeration and mechanical turning, for example, an Earth Tub. These systems have high capital costs and require skilled labor to maintain. There are advantages to in-vessel composting: it's faster, requires less labor and is less likely to have problems with flies or odors. In-vessel systems can produce compost in just a few weeks.

One Bin System – A one bin system can be square, circular or cone shaped and can be commercial or homemade. Most commercial bins have lids and ventilation and may be animal resistant. These bins are good for smaller yards and areas with animals. Bins aid in moisture and heat retention. Many people prefer to have an enclosed bin because it is more attractive. However, they can be hard to turn and harvest.

Multi Bin System – This is a great system for a household or community space generating a significant amount of waste. This system is efficient, allowing you to have three working piles at different stages of decomposition, and it is easy to turn and harvest. This style bin can be made animal resistant.

Tumbler or Spinner – These self-contained barrels, drums or balls rotate for easy mixing and fast decomposition. They are more expensive than other systems, but can be more convenient because they are easier to turn. These bins are fine for small spaces and are usually animal resistant.

This information comes from the Santa Cruz County Home Composting Program.