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take the finished product off your hands."

In 1999, in an attempt to encourage businesses to divert organic matter into valuable compost material, the city of Eugene installed an Earth Tub at the Market of Choice located at 2858 Willamette St. Caith Wiles, a produce clerk at Market of Choice, has overseen the process for the past seven years. The store is composting close to 150 pounds of produce per day, and Wiles says they are using the compost system close to its full potential.

"I would estimate that we compost about 50 percent of our kitchen waste, which doesn't sound like much but is considerably higher than most grocery stores in the state," Wiles explains.

After the initial training provided to employees by the city, it took a while for the separation process to run smoothly, but "we now have a steady, effortless system and a dedicated crew," says Wiles. The store gives all of its compost material to customers. "We give our compost away for free to whoever wants it. Most of the people who end up asking for it are gardeners, farmers or volunteers who work for a community garden," says Wiles. "It is a great process that wouldn't be possible if not for the efforts of city officials."

Donahue wants to keep those efforts going. "Even though the city is doing all we can within our limits to reduce waste, we still get calls from people everyday asking us to do more," she says. People ask about when the city is going to establish a citywide commercial composting program like Portland's. "It took Portland a long time to get to the place they are now with composting at restaurants," Donahue says. "I would love to see Eugene go the same route but also one day include residential food waste pickup, but it will be a few years before that can happen."

Portland, like Eugene, is not able to have residential curbside pickup yet, but the city does have commercial food composting available to restaurants and some businesses, including the Portland International Airport. The same trucks used to pick up trash and yard debris are used to make "food waste-only" runs. The food, paper and yard debris are then taken to a Washington facility, Cedar Grove Composting, where the company uses it to make and sell compost in the Northwest. Currently, there is no approved composting facility in the Portland metropolitan area that can accept all the types of food waste collected in this program.

Most of the limitations placed on local composting facilities such as Rexius and Lane Forest Products have to do with odor and sanitation issues. "The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) allows facilities to compost any green feed stock but restricts any non-green feed stock like meat or dairy products because there are not any facilities up to code in Oregon to take that kind of waste," explains Bob Barrows of DEQ. "For the past five years we have been working on changing the requirements for facilities. Once the changes are made, the facilities will be able to sufficiently house kitchen waste from residents and businesses." That will take another year, he says.

Rexius is looking forward to one day soon being able to house all forms of compost material, says Jack Hoeck, vice president of production, but until then the company will continue to compost yard debris

ITEMS TO COMPOST

Grass clippings
Flowers
Annual weeds
Fruit and vegetables
Coffee grounds & tea filters
Egg shells
Leaves
Chopped twigs
Straw
Wood ash
Shredded paper
Sawdust

DO NOT COMPOST

Diseased plants
Weeds with seeds
Invasive weeds like quack grass and morning glory
Charcoal ash
Dairy products
Grease, cooking oil or oily foods
Peanut butter
Meat or fish
Pet feces

and introduce more compostable products into the community.

"Rexius has worked with many events around town, Art and the Vineyard and the UO Street Fair, providing compostable kitchenware for event attendees — forks, cups, spoons and plates. I am excited about compostable foodwares because I think the future of composting will involve these products," says Hoeck.

In the Northwest alone, several companies distribute compostable food ware items and supplies, including Biodegradable Food Service, LLC in Bend. All products are biodegradable and compostable, non-toxic, odorless, heat tolerant and water-resistant. Depending on the company, the utensils might be made from corn starch, sugarcane, renewable plastics or reclaimed fiber.

One of the largest events in Lane County went completely compostable this year. At the Oregon Country Fair, the establishment used only biodegradable and compostable dishware, in an attempt to get to a goal of zero waste.

"You would be surprised, but the compostable products are about the same price as buying plastic utensils," says Hoeck. "It is actually very reasonable, and at large events the products have done wonders to reduce the large amount of waste that would have otherwise just been dumped into the landfill."

Whether Eugene gets a citywide composting program or not, people like Donahue, Vandertuin, Kafis and all the other composting soldiers throughout Lane County will still be out there spreading the word and teaching the next generation of future composters.

"I don't think that the city really needs to establish a food waste pickup program," says "Mr. Worm" Dave Kafis. That's because others are taking it on: "It is up to the community and individuals to step up and be active in finding their own resources." **EW**

If you are interested in composting but don't know how to start, here are some resources.

For information on composting basics, how to get started, uses for compost and information on compost classes, visit the City of Eugene website at www.eugenerecycles.org or the Oregon State University extension service at www.extension.oregonstate.edu

The OSU extension service is also available to answer composting questions on their compost hotline at (541) 682-7320, or you can email at compost.specialists@oregonstate.edu

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