



Maryland Chapter
P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 253 “Environment – On–Farm Composting Facilities – Permit Exemption”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 15, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 253. Current regulations allow on-farm compost facilities to operate without an MDE-issued permit within specific limits, including a footprint of 40,000 square feet or less for most feedstocks, but within a footprint of only 5,000 square feet for food residuals. This bill will expand the footprint for on-farm composting of food residuals without an MDE-issued permit from the current 5,000 square feet or less to 40,000 square feet or less.

HB 253 will increase the availability of food residual composting operations and bring them closer to where food residuals are generated, with the following benefits:

- **Conserving resources and increasing the use of compost**, a valuable soil amendment for local farmers. It is an opportunity for farmers to reduce reliance on chemical fertilizers that pollute air and water and are a petroleum product requiring energy to produce.
- **Diverting organic waste from landfills and incinerators**. Food waste is nearly 18% of municipal solid waste (MSW) by weight in municipal landfills, and about 30% of MSW is compostable.¹ Landfill space in Maryland is already in critically short supply, with existing capacity to last 31 years.² Diversion of food waste will reduce costs to taxpayers for waste disposal and conserve landfill space for waste that cannot be diverted.
- **Contributing to reaching Maryland’s Zero Waste food scrap goals of 60% diversion by 2025, 70% by 2030, and 90% by 2040.**³ To achieve these targets, the state’s Zero Waste Plan calls for increasing food donation, promoting compost use, and phasing in a food scrap disposal ban in commercial and institutional organizations – all of which are promoted by this bill.
- **Reducing future landfill methane emissions**. The anaerobic decomposition of organic matter such as food residuals in a tightly compacted landfill releases methane, a greenhouse gas many times more potent than carbon dioxide.

In addition to these benefits, diverting food waste from the waste stream would create green businesses and jobs and benefit the agricultural sector. It is an important step on the path to zero waste. For these reasons, the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 253.

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¹ MSW Consultants. 2017. “2016 Maryland Statewide Waste Characterization Study: Final Report.” MDE, July. Figure ES-3.

² Department of Legislative Services, Office of Policy Analysis. 2017. “Solid Waste Management and Recycling in Maryland.” Annapolis, Maryland. p. vii. (<http://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NatRes/January-2017-Waste-Management-in-Maryland.pdf>)

³ Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). 2014. “Zero Waste Maryland: Maryland’s Plan to Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle Nearly All Waste Generated in Maryland by 2040.” December.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.