

**TESTIMONY TO THE MARYLAND SENATE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION, ENERGY, &
THE ENVIRONMENT, AND BUDGET & TAXATION**

**SB 134 – Solid Waste Disposal Surcharge and Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Fund and
Grant Programs**

Position: Support

February 11th, 2025 Public Hearing

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Dear Committee Members,

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance urges a favorable report on SB 134 – Solid Waste Disposal Surcharge and Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Fund and Grant Programs. This bill would establish significant and needed funding for reducing food waste and diverting wasted food and other organics from landfills and incinerators, including food rescue, composting, and a transition to durable food service ware. The bill supports schools, farmers, businesses, and local government, and does so in a way that protects Maryland taxpayers from rising food costs as well as rising future solid waste management costs. The average family of four in America spends \$1,500 per year on uneaten food.¹ At the same time, landfills are filling up faster than projected and new ones are far more expensive than waste reduction, reuse, and recycling/composting strategies. This bill offers a proven way to pay for key environmental programming in the State's Priority Climate Action Plan that doesn't rely on federal cash and doesn't contribute to the state's budget deficit. **In fact, it represents exactly what state leaders have articulated is needed: it is a new revenue-creating policy that keeps our state competitive with the surrounding region while prioritizing safety, economic growth, and the environment.**

We thank Senator Hester for sponsoring this legislation in the Senate to establish a self-funding mechanism to support a wide range of desperately needed projects throughout the state. Schools that invest in durable foodservice ware, for example, could realize thousands of dollars in net savings per year from the avoided cost of expensive throw-aways.

Other key reasons to support this bill include:

- Maryland's recycling level has stagnated and landfills are approaching capacity.
- Maryland's landfills are emitting four times more methane than previously estimated.
- More programs focused on wasted food prevention, reuse, repair, and composting are needed in Maryland. For instance, in 2021, less than 23% of the 1,060,014 tons of wasted food in Maryland was recycled,² and a major report found that policies to fund and incentivize food waste reduction and composting in Maryland are weak.³

¹ US Department of Agriculture: <https://www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste/consumers>

² Maryland Dept. of the Environment website, "[Solid Waste Management - Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals.](#)" 819,846 tons were disposed of in landfills and incinerators. Only 240,168 tons were recycled or diverted as animal feed.

³ Natural Resources Defense Council, [Maryland Food Waste Policy Gap Analysis and Inventory](#). October 2021 (p. 13).

- HB 264, passed in the 2021 session, requires large food waste generators to divert their wasted food if capacity exists. SB 134 now creates a tremendous opportunity to support farmers in creating some of that needed capacity and in using compost produced in the state. An influx of diverted food waste will require expanded processing capacity at all levels (including community-scale and farm composters).
- We have heard first-hand testimony from other states (including Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Indiana, Minnesota, North Carolina and Iowa) who have a similar disposal surcharge to waste diversion mechanism in place. These states have shared that their programs have had positive impacts on their local communities, economies, and the environment. Wisconsin's \$7 per ton recycling fee, for instance, generates \$37 million to \$40 million per year in funding. Even states such as Indiana with a small per ton fee have had tremendous impact. In 2020, its \$1.8 million in grant funding created 47 new jobs and diverted 85,000 tons in new material from disposal. Why not Maryland too?
- The New York State's new Solid Waste Management Plan calls for a \$5/ton surcharge as one of its three top legislative priorities.
- The grant programs will help Maryland businesses develop and expand their food waste diversion efforts. It will also provide direct funding to counties to fund a wide range of projects.
- The bill has a built-in funding mechanism. This is not an unfunded mandate on the state.
- This bill complements SB 346/HB 232 – Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program, which would establish a deposit on beverage containers in the state.
- Expanding waste prevention, reuse, repair, recycling, and composting brings myriad benefits and co-benefits to Maryland: jobs, Bay protection, cleaner air and water, climate protection (see, attached infographics). On a per-ton basis, making compost employs twice as many workers as landfills and four times as many workers as incinerators.

Since the bill's first introduction in the 2022 session, there have been a number of changes based on conversations with numerous stakeholders to address their concerns and suggestions to improve this bill. ILSR, with the guidance of bill sponsors, has gathered input from numerous stakeholders in order to get this bill to fit Maryland's unique landscape. Last year, ILSR collaborated extensively with the Maryland Department of Environment and Department of Agriculture to ensure the bill filled programmatic gaps and was implementable by the agencies.

Sincerely,



Brenda Platt

Director, Composting for Community Project, Institute for Local Self Reliance

Attachments: (1) Funding for Reuse Will Save Schools Money, (2) Infographic: Composting Creates Jobs, (3) Infographic: Compost Enhances Soil and Protects Watersheds, and (4) Infographic: Compost Climate Connections

Funding for Reuse Will Save Schools Money

Average annual savings for schools that switch to reusables:



Over \$2,800 in total
cost savings



3,300 pounds of
waste eliminated



73,747 single-use
items eliminated



9,747 gallons of
water saved



Over 19 tons in
carbon savings



Over \$1,000 in waste
hauling savings

Upstream Solutions, *Conscious Cafeteria Report*, September 2024
<https://upstreamolutions.org/blog/the-conscious-cafeteria-report>

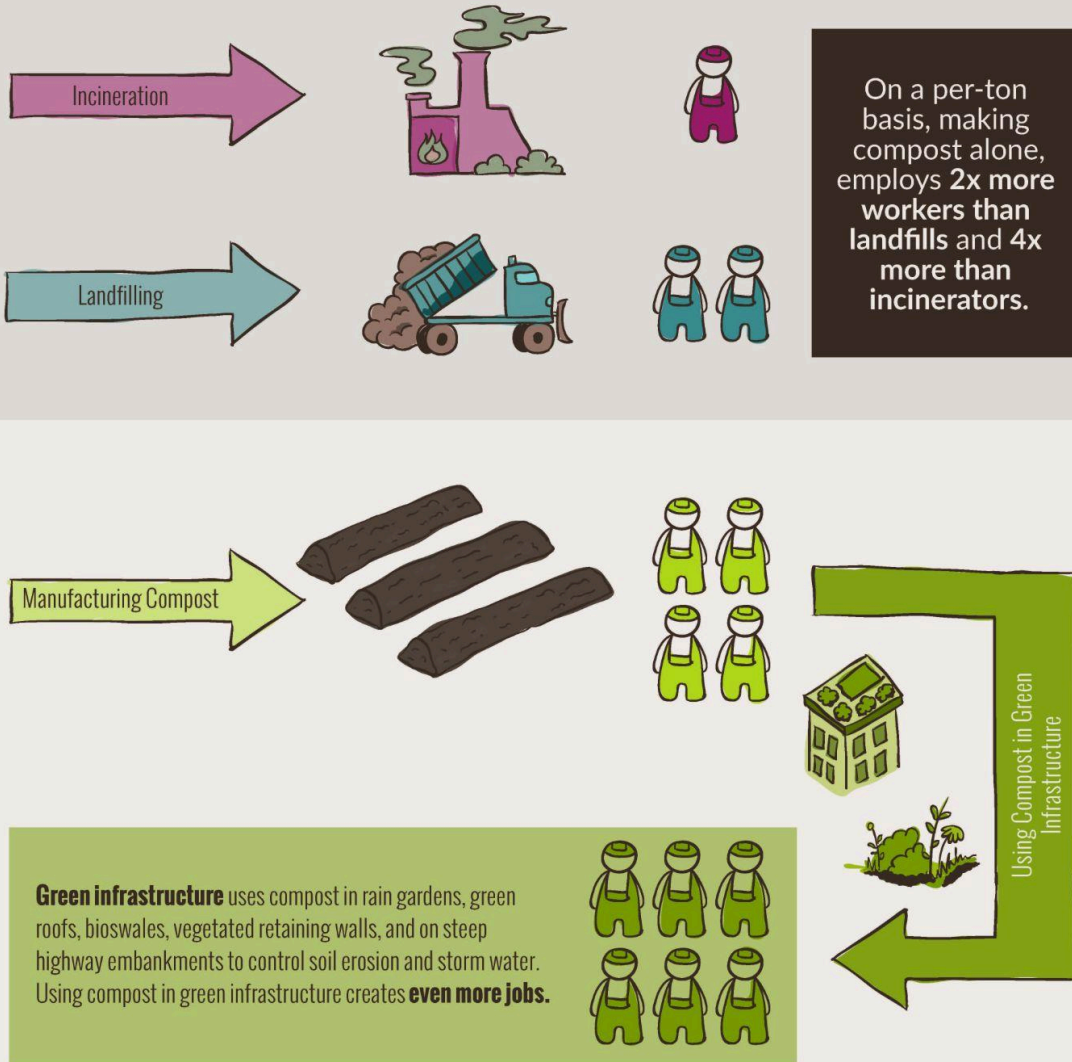
In 2024, 15 elementary schools across the US switched to reusable stainless steel trays (and in some cases, utensils). The pilot study highlights the significant projected environmental and economic benefits of leaving single-use foodware behind.

Composting Creates Jobs

Jobs are sustained in each stage of the organics recovery cycle.

PER 10,000 TONS WASTE/YEAR

JOBS SUSTAINED



SOURCES:

Brenda Platt, Bobby Bell, and Cameron Harsh, Pay Dirt: Composting in Maryland to Reduce Waste, Create Jobs & Protect the Bay, Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), May 2013.
Brenda Platt, Nora Goldstein, Craig Coker, and Sally Brown, The State of Composting in the U.S.: What, Why, Where, & How, Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), June 2015.
Brenda Platt and Neil Seldman, Wasting and Recycling in the United States 2000, Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), 2000.

Composting Enhances Soil and Protects Watersheds

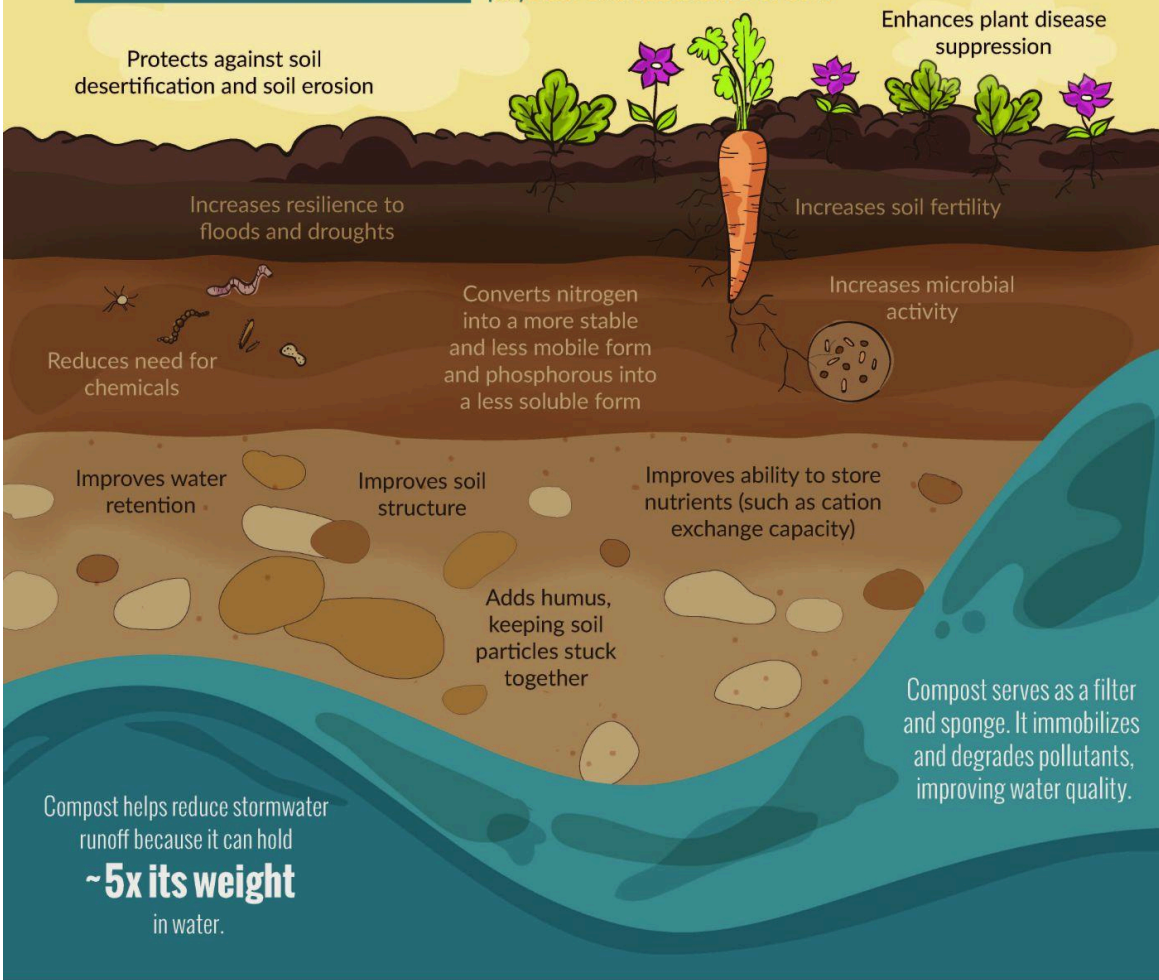
Healthy soils are essential for protecting watersheds. Compost is the best way to add organic matter—which is vital—to soils.

When added to soil, compost can filter out urban stormwater pollutants by an astounding **60-95%**



IT'S ALL ABOUT THE SOIL

COMPOST improves biological, chemical, and physical characteristics of soil.



SOURCES:

Bobby Bell and Brenda Platt, *Building Healthy Soils with Compost to Protect Watersheds*, Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), June 2014.
 Brenda Platt, Nora Goldstein, Craig Coker, and Sally Brown, *The State of Composting in the U.S.: What, Why, Where, & How*, Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), June 2015.
 "Why Build Healthy Soil?" Washington Organic Recycling Council (WORC) Soils for Salmon Project, accessed April 2016.
 United States Composting Council (USCC), "Specify and Use COMPOST for LEED & Sustainable Sites Projects: A Natural Connection"
 "Soil Health Key Points," Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA, February 2013.
 "Increasing Soil Organic Matter with Compost," *Compost: The Sustainable Solution*, US Composting Council, July 2014.
 "Strive for 5%," US Composting Council's campaign to promote 5% organic matter in soils, US Composting Council.

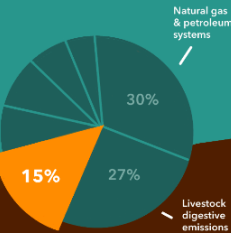
HOW COMPOSTING COMBATS THE CLIMATE CRISIS

1 AVOIDS WASTE OUTCOMES WITH HIGH EMISSIONS

Landfilling food scraps produces **20x** the CO₂e emissions (as methane) as composting

...and when used, compost's net emissions become negative!

Landfills are the **third-largest** source of human-related methane emissions in the U.S.



2 ENHANCES SOIL QUALITY

Compost increases:



Nutrients in soil

- Grows healthier, more nutritious plants & food
- Reduces use of synthetic nitrogen & fossil-fuel-intensive fertilizers

Synthetic nitrogen accounts for **80%** of human-related nitrous oxide emissions



Water holding capacity

Increases soil resiliency to extreme heat & flooding

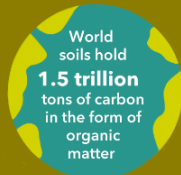


Soil aggregation

Prevents erosion & runoff, thus protecting & restoring waterways

Normally it takes **1,800 years** to build **6 inches** of topsoil but with compost, it takes only **6 months**

3 SEQUESTERS CARBON



What's one of the best ways to build soil organic matter?

Compost!

Degraded soil actually **RELEASES** carbon

But a **1-time** application of compost can make soil a carbon sink again!

Just 1 acre amended with compost can sequester up to

75%

of a car's annual emissions



Compost also increases crop yield & vegetation, leading to even more carbon sequestration

4 BUILDS COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

Healthy soil =

- Food security
- Profitable farms
- Enhanced habitat & biodiversity
- Resilient ecosystems

Degraded soil has been linked historically to the fall of civilization!

Community composting =



- Local jobs
- Environmental education
- Community bonds & safety
- Physical activity & healthy diets
- Social inclusion & empowerment