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COMPOST CREW: An Integral Part of its Communities

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT



**COMPOST
CREW**

An Integral Part of its Communities



Adapting to changing environments while building a reliable and impactful business, Compost Crew has not only educated people and organizations on recycling their food scraps and other organic waste, they have also collaborated with local government leaders to encourage the adoption of regulations that support more food scrap composting and programs that make the service more accessible to residents throughout their region.

FOUNDED IN 2011 IN ROCKVILLE, MD BY RYAN WALTER and Brian Flores, Compost Crew began as a self-funded effort focused on diverting food scraps from landfills by providing curbside collection in Maryland's Montgomery County. In 2018, entrepreneur Ben Parry, who spent his professional career in the renewable energy industry, acquired Compost Crew. At that time, the company operated three collection trucks serving individual households. Under his leadership, the company began expanding its commercial services and partnerships and significantly grew its vehicle fleet and workforce. The service area also grew to encompass much larger portions of Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Northern Virginia—a region affectionately known by locals as “the DMV”.

In 2024, Compost Crew acquired Key City Compost, a like-minded food scraps recycling company based in Frederick, MD, which is located northwest of Washington, D.C., and brought Compost Crew into an adjacent territory. This acquisition gave Compost Crew a larger composting facility than the company had previously operated. Today, Compost Crew services more than 23,000 homes and businesses throughout the DMV, with a fleet of approximately 40 trucks and over 80 employees contributing to the organization's success.

Top: Compost Crew operates the largest fleet of trucks dedicated to organic waste hauling in the DMV.

Bottom: Compost Crew CEO Ben Parry with Margaret Morgan-Hubbard, Founder and CEO of ECO City Farms.

Compost Crew serves the Greater Washington, D.C. area, including large portions of Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Northern Virginia. In Maryland, Compost Crew got its start in Montgomery County and has a large number of customers in Prince George’s County, Baltimore County, and Baltimore City. In Northern Virginia, Compost Crew services Fairfax County, Arlington County, and the City of Alexandria. Compost Crew partners with many local governments to provide curbside food waste collection services to residents on behalf of the municipality, which either fully or partially subsidize the cost of services.

Compost Crew has a variety of different style trucks to accommodate collections from customers of all sizes, including rear loaders, roll-off trucks, and modified pick-up trucks, which, together, can collect anything from a 5-gallon bucket to compactors and dumpsters. Compost Crew also services a large number of food scrap drop-off locations in the area. Some of these are sponsored by local governments for their residents, others are sponsored by local businesses, and a third group are operated by Compost Crew.

Education and Resiliency

Currently, Compost Crew only recycles food scraps and other materials into finished compost. “Food scraps are infinitely recyclable and contribute to a healthier local ecosystem by reducing waste sent to landfill and producing a product that reduces the dependence on chemical fertilizers to grow new crops. We operate our own composting facilities and work with other facilities in the area. We also own a composting site in Frederick County that accepts 20,000 tons of organic material annually. In addition, Compost Crew operates half a dozen of our smaller scale Compost Outposts®, located on area farms,” says CEO Ben Parry.

Compost Crew also hauls the food scraps it collects to be processed at three different partner facilities in the region:

1. The Prince George’s County Organics Composting Facility in Upper Marlboro, MD, which handles yard trim and food scraps from residential, institutional, and educational sources.
2. The Balls Ford Road Composting Facility in Manassas, VA, which is operated via a public-private partnership between Convertus and Prince William County.
3. The Maryland Bioenergy Center, an anaerobic digestion facility located in Jessup, MD.

In the past few years, some local regulations promoting the diversion of food scraps have helped encourage more local businesses to start recycling their food waste. “In the state of Maryland, in particular, starting in 2023, certain businesses that generated more than 2 tons of food waste per week were required



Kristie Blumer and Julie Williamson from Compost Crew give a composting demonstration at a Compost Outpost in Fairfax County, VA. Photos courtesy of Compost Crew.

to start diverting that food waste to be composted. In 2024, the amount was reduced to 1 ton per week, requiring additional businesses to seek composting solutions. And in Washington D.C., large entities like grocery stores, educational facilities, and retail food stores more than 10,000 square feet are now required to divert organic waste for composting or donate excess edible food,” Parry explains. “As a result, more organizations have come to us seeking a solution for diverting their food scraps, and the number of businesses the company services has grown.”

More recently, Compost Crew has seen some supply chain shortages and price increases that have had an effect on the business. As a result, the company has attempted to work with multiple suppliers and provide more lead time on supply orders, to adapt to the changing environment. However, Parry points out that the biggest challenge that Compost Crew encounters every day is inertia, and how to get people and organizations who have long put their food waste in the trash to shift to recycling their food scraps. “From the time that many of us were young, our parents would say ‘if you don’t want it, put it in the trash’. These old habits die hard. Ongoing education—of prospective customers, of policy makers, and of others in the ecosystem who may not be aware of the benefits of composting—remains one of the biggest challenges we face. In many areas, composting continues to be a voluntary effort which relies on the participation of residents and businesses at their own expense.”

He goes on to say that much like recycling in earlier decades, encouraging people and organizations to recycle their food scraps and other organic waste will take ongoing education to help people understand how it works and the benefits of com-



Above: The Compost Outpost at One Acre Farm in Dickerson, MD.

Right: Farm Feast compost is Compost Crew's brand of compost made from food scraps sourced directly from the company's residential and commercial customers.



posting. “Done correctly, it is a valuable sustainable source for building healthy soil and contributing to a healthier local food system, while making communities more resilient and extending the lifetimes of local landfills. We provide onsite and virtual training for our commercial customers and have a wide array of materials for our residential customers including a blog, frequent social media posts, and events to help people learn more about composting. Compost Crew is also a founding member of the MD-DC chapter of the US Composting Council, which is another avenue through which we help educate the public.”

Employee Development

Compost Crew has a range of different organizational programs designed to promote employee development and well-being, including:

- *Certified Professionals at Every Site:* All of Compost Crew's composting operations are overseen by Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA)–certified Compost Fa-

cility Operators. This certification confirms that staff understand compost science, site management, public health standards, and state regulations. Fourteen employees have earned this credential, and every Compost Outpost® has a certified operator onsite.

- *Fellowship Program for Future Leaders:* Since 2021, Compost Crew has trained 27 fellows through a structured six-month internship program. Fellows learn proper compost pile monitoring (moisture, temperature, gas levels), carbon-to-nitrogen balancing, site cleanliness, and compost maturity testing. This program prepares participants to get certified by the state of Maryland to manage composting operations safely and responsibly and serves as a pipeline for new industry professionals.

Certification is treated as a professional benchmark rather than just a legal requirement, ensuring that employees across departments understand the environmental and operational responsibilities of composting. Alumni from the fellowship



Above: Compost Crew truck on its way to a pick up in Silver Spring, MD.

Right: Compost Crew residential driver empties a bin into one of Compost Crew's trucks in Alexandria, VA.



program, including current team leaders, now help train new cohorts, creating a cycle of professional growth and maintaining consistent best practices. The company also has a safety committee that meets regularly to review any safety incidents and discuss opportunities for improving safe practices in all of its operations.

Connecting with the Community

Compost Crew has been an integral part of the local communities where it operates in an effort to educate the public about composting and to provide quality finished compost products to the agricultural community and residential gardeners. The following are some of the outreach efforts in the community:

- Compost Crew works with multiple food rescue organizations, such as Manna Food, to compost inedible food that is received by these organizations, and employees also volunteer their time to support these organizations.
- Compost Crew collaborates with area farms to create local composting sites that can educate the local community about the benefits of composting, while producing high-quality compost that can be used right there on the farms.

Compost Crew also supports Bethesda Green, a local incubator for environmental start-ups that focuses on environmental education and sustainable community-building work in Maryland.

“We are proud of the work we have done to inspire thousands of people and businesses in the greater Washington, DC area to

start recycling their food waste. We have also collaborated with local government leaders to encourage the adoption of regulations that support more food scrap composting and programs that make this service more accessible to residents throughout the region. Among the many area municipalities we partner with are the District of Columbia, City of Alexandria, City of Frederick, City of College Park, City of Greenbelt, Town of Chevy Chase, and the Town of Somerset,” says Parry.

Continuing to Expand

Compost Crew’s leadership team is proud of building a reliable and impactful business, one which provides good paying jobs for more than 80 people, who are doing work that makes a difference for the local environment. Compost Crew became a benefit corporation in 2023, meaning that the company has a mission to protect the local environment, in addition to its responsibility to

its shareholders. Compost Crew aims to continue to expand the number of customers serviced in the Greater Washington, DC area and inspire many more homes and organizations to start recycling their food waste. Last year, the company diverted over 26 million pounds of food scraps away from local landfills and incinerators and aim to keep increasing the number every year.

Parry says, “Our mission is to inspire people to make food waste recycling part of everyday life. As more communities in Maryland, DC and Virginia look for easy and reliable food waste recycling solutions, Compost Crew is at their service. We will continue our hard work to serve as businesses, government agencies, schools, and other organizations to divert their food waste and help us build healthy soil, healthier food, and more resilient communities. | **WA**

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