metroSTOR® webinar
Waste & Recycling Infrastructure

metroSTOR Webinar Summary and Transcript

Food Waste Drop-Offs in *Action*

08.07.25

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Introduction

Hosted by metroSTOR with Tim Steckel of The Compost Marketing Agency, this webinar brought together four speakers from across the United States to share their real-world experiences implementing food waste drop-off programs. The goal was to explore the practicalities, challenges and successes of community organics collection in both municipal and private contexts.

Scott Atkin – Town of Manchester, Connecticut

- Manchester (pop. 60,000) launched a food scrap drop-off program as a cost-effective alternative to curbside collection, due to limited in-state disposal options and high transportation costs.
- Started with five drop-off sites, strategically located for foot traffic, including parks, a senior center and the transfer station.
- Chose metroSTOR containers for ease of access and cleanliness. Mobile app access was initially used, though keypad alternatives are being explored for older residents.
- Outreach included brochures, email newsletters, a promotional video with the mayor and live events.
- Achieved 15 tons collected in the first year with around 75 regular users per week. Contamination is very low.
- Start-up costs were approximately $20,000–$25,000, funded through local enterprise funds and Connecticut's "nip" litter fee.
- Lessons included the importance of location, app usability, good signage and battery reliability.

Emily Williams – City of Hailey, Idaho

- Hailey (pop. ~10,000) is a remote, tourist-heavy town with a landfill 100 miles away, making diversion of food waste a logistical and environmental priority.
- Launched a 24/7 drop-off program funded by a state grant. Bins were placed at City Hall, the post office, parks and grocery stores.
- Initially used both app and keypad access—keypad proved more popular, leading to hybrid access in newer bins.
- Outreach was minimal but effective: a bilingual postcard to every household and QR codes on bins linking to instructions.
- Residents appreciated the wide acceptance of compostable materials. A new ADA-compliant bin improved accessibility.
- Program expanded quickly due to high demand, with much of the grant money redirected to buying additional bins.

Michael Heimbach – City of Coconut Creek, Florida

- Coconut Creek (pop. 60,000) is rolling out its drop-off program methodically, beginning with a pilot for 50 residents.
- Focused on avoiding landfill use and aligning with the city's commitment to sustainability.
- metroSTOR containers with keypad access were placed at an existing weekend recycling site.
- Participants received starter kits including outdoor buckets, kitchen caddies and compostable liners.
- Emphasis on clear expectations and education led to very clean material, though not all registrants are active users.
- Plans to expand to multifamily housing and pilot a commercial food waste program, aiming for mandatory diversion in large complexes.
- Believes exclusive, phased rollout builds program commitment and compliance.

Todd Rothe – Big Lake Organics, Wisconsin

- Operates in a rural area across 60 miles with ~12,000–14,000 people. As a private hauler and composter, Todd provides subscription-based service at $10/month.
- Initially inherited a poorly managed community composting system, which was transformed using metroSTOR units to eliminate contamination and pest issues.
- Uses a mix of app and keypad access—keypad is crucial for non-tech users but limits data tracking.
- Strategically places units in high-traffic areas, like grocery stores and health clinics and services them with clean swaps and power washing.
- Has 114 subscribers to date and continues to grow. Seasonal subscriptions are available for part-time residents.
- Advocates for transparency around costs, framing composting as a values-based service, not a free utility.

Closing Summary and Discussion

- Contamination across all programs was reported as very low, thanks to access control, education and user commitment.
- Curbside collection remains unattractive due to cost, labor and participation concerns.
- Questions from attendees focused on:
    - App functionality (metroKEY)
    - Payment models and billing platforms
    - Commercial vs residential models
    - Permitting and siting processes (minimal or none required in most cases)
    - The value of partnerships with grocery stores and businesses

The webinar concluded with a shared goal: to normalize organics drop-off as a clean, effective, community-based solution. Speakers encouraged others to start small, learn from users and adapt as needed.

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metroSTOR Webinar Chat Summary

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Participant Chat Summary

There was excellent engagement from participants throughout the session, with a wide range of insightful contributions, questions and real-world examples shared via the chat.

The discussion highlighted community-led solutions, operational challenges and opportunities for improving access, equity and education in food scrap drop-off programs. Key points and resources shared included:

Composting Infrastructure and Access:

- Attendees shared different styles of backyard and community compost bins, with various access methods including keypad entry, number padlocks, combination locks, and honor systems.
- Several participants raised concerns about access for residents without smartphones or internet access, particularly in lower-income or rural communities. Suggested solutions included distributing access codes through public libraries or community centers.
- Weather resistance was a key concern for lock systems, with tips shared such as using WD-40 to prevent locks from seizing in rain.
- Programs are experimenting with seasonal code systems and selective access during summer months to reduce contamination and encourage registration.

Funding Models and Program Design:

- Speakers shared examples of creative funding sources, including revenue from transfer stations and a 5-cent tax on small alcohol purchases.
- Hailey, Idaho received a grant of just over $30,000 to support its program.
- Many programs operate on either a free municipal model or a paid membership basis, typically around $12 per month, with options for internal financial aid ($6/month) where needed.
- Peels & Wheels, a hyperlocal e-bike service in New Haven, was highlighted as a subscription-based collection model charging $31/month for weekly pickup or $21/month biweekly: https://www.pwcompost.com/sign-up

Subscription Systems and Billing Tools:

- Billing and subscription platforms mentioned included Jotform (https://www.jotform.com), Stripe (via Stopcheckr), and in-house systems.
- Some programs avoid smartphone apps to maintain inclusivity, using shared or seasonal access codes instead.
- Others discussed using personalized codes for easier suspension or reactivation based on subscription status, though this can present customer support challenges.

Equity, Engagement, and Community Impact:

- Several contributors emphasized the need for accessible infrastructure and education in marginalized areas where illegal dumping is a concern.
- Feedback highlighted the success of library-located drop-off sites and the value of simple, intuitive access systems for seniors and less tech-savvy users.
- Programs are also using strategic pilot sites to gather data for citywide expansion proposals and to unlock further municipal funding.

Operational Insights and Contamination Management:

- 64-gallon bins were reported to hold up to 300 lbs of organics when full.
- Attendees asked about identifying plant versus yard waste, preventing commercial use of residential bins, and tracing contamination.
- Some communities contact residents directly in cases of contamination, while others use monitoring and seasonal restrictions to manage compliance.

Resources Shared During the Webinar:

Manchester, CT Residential Food Waste Program:

- https://www.manchesterct.gov/Government/Departments/Public-Works/Sanitation-Division/Residential-Food-Waste#section-4

Manchester CT YouTube video:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?si=3t9N9UcFvfndMVqo&v=PG3njAPmWR8&feature=youtu.be

Peels & Wheels, New Haven:

- https://www.pwcompost.com/sign-up

My Green Michigan – Commercial Food Waste Hauler:

- https://www.mygreenmi.com

Big Lake Organics Residential Composting:

- https://biglakeorganics.com/residential-compost/

SWACO Business Recycling Champions Program (Franklin County, OH):

- https://www.swaco.org/425/6279/Business-Champion-Programs

Final Comments:

Participants expressed appreciation for the speakers and insights provided, noting the value of connecting with others running similar programs.

Several offered to continue the conversation after the event and welcomed outreach on topics such as business district drop-off programs, subscription models, and contamination control.

metroSTOR Webinar Transcript

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08.07.25

Nigel Deacon:

metroSTOR – Food Waste Drop-Offs in Action, July 8, 2025

Webinar Transcript with:
Michael Heimbach (Coconut Creek, FL)
Emily Williams (Hailey, ID)
Scott Atkin (Manchester, CT)
Todd Rothe (Big Lake Organics, WI)
Tim Steckel (The Compost Marketing Agency)

Tim Steckel

Today is a special event. We have four people with us who are going to share their stories and experiences with starting, launching, and running organic waste drop-off stations in the United States.

We will begin with Scott Atkin from the Town of Manchester in Connecticut, who will share his experience. Then we will hear from Emily Williams with the City of Hailey, in south-central Idaho. After that, Michael Helmbach from the City of Coconut Creek in Florida will speak. Our final speaker will be Todd Rothe from Big Lake Organics in Ashland, Wisconsin.

So, we have three individuals who will speak from the perspective of a city or town, and then Todd, who works in a private business as an organic waste hauler. I think this makes for a really strong panel.

I will not go too deeply into why organic waste drop-off stations are important. I believe—and hope—that most of you already understand their significance. That is why you are here.

Scott Atkin

Good day, morning, or evening—wherever you happen to be. I am from the Town of Manchester, Connecticut. We have about 60,000 residents and around 16,000 residential housing units.

Before starting our food scrap drop-off program, we already had several composting activities in place. We collect leaves and yard waste both curbside in the fall and at our transfer station. That material is windrowed at our landfill and transfer station site, and we produce compost for residents to take or purchase, typically in late summer or early fall. We also have a community composting program that includes both yard waste and food scraps at our community gardens. The compost generated there is used on-site. So, people in Manchester were already familiar with different composting activities.

We started a food scrap collection program last year to try to divert material from our municipal solid waste (MSW) stream. In Connecticut, we have limited options for MSW—some material goes to a resource recovery facility, but much of it ends up being shipped hundreds of miles out of state. We were interested in food scraps not just for diversion, but also for the environmental benefits, including reducing transport and disposal mileage, producing compost, and creating renewable energy from the anaerobic digesters currently processing our materials.

When the town looked into food scrap drop-off, we considered the high start-up costs of curbside collection. We already provide trash, recycling, yard waste, and bulk pickup services weekly, so adding food waste collection would have required substantial investment in bins and infrastructure. The operating costs for collection and transportation were also projected to be high. Some recent studies in the state showed that curbside participation at the neighborhood level was less than 30%, which did not make good economic sense for our 16,000 residential units. Additionally, curbside programs often suffer from high contamination rates.

Instead, we started a pilot program to gauge community interest. We set up five drop-off locations—four around town and one at our transfer station. The sites were chosen for convenience and foot traffic. They included the transfer station, the Senior Center, one of our libraries, and a well-used park with a swimming pool.

We evaluated various collection containers based on pricing, accessibility, and ease of use. We ultimately selected the metroSTOR container. We liked its mobile app access and foot pedal feature, which made it easier and more hygienic for users. Each location had to be permitted with the state, which was a fairly straightforward process for satellite collection. Initially, we scheduled weekly pickups, but during the hotter and busier summer months, we increased service to twice weekly.

Funding for the program came from two sources. First, our transfer station and landfill operate under an enterprise fund, so we have some budget independence from the town. Second, we used funds from the state's "nip" fee—Connecticut collects $0.05 per miniature alcohol bottle sold, which goes back to the town where the bottle was purchased. That money must be used for litter cleanup and waste diversion activities. As one of the larger towns, we receive a substantial share, which we are putting to good use.

To get the word out, we used brochures and pamphlets at the transfer station, regular updates on our website, and our town's newsletter and email blasts. Our recycling coordinator was present at farmers markets and town events throughout the spring and summer. We also hosted several public presentations on backyard composting and recycling. We created a short educational video for our website featuring the mayor and town manager making basketball-style shots with food scraps—Connecticut is a big basketball state. We added a few local kids to the mix, and the video was both engaging and informative.

Consistency in messaging has been key. We did experience some confusion early on between our community composting program, which only accepts leafy greens and yard waste, and the broader list of acceptable items for food scrap drop-off. But we addressed that through clearer education and signage.

We began with the transfer station drop-off. Although it did not use a metroSTOR unit, it allowed any resident with a free permit to participate. In the first two to three months, we collected just under a ton of material and distributed five-gallon compost buckets, informational flyers, and rolls of 25 compostable bags suitable for anaerobic digestion. Satellite drop-off units were rolled out in mid-April.

Start-up costs were around $20,000 to $25,000. We handled much of the work in-house—Public Works placed the containers and we produced most of the marketing materials. Our ongoing collection and disposal costs are roughly double what we pay for MSW disposal.

About 6% of our transfer station users are registered in the food scrap program. We average about 75 regular users per week, though that fluctuates with the seasons. We collected 15 tons over the past year. Even when users call with complaints—whether about a malfunctioning foot pedal or downtime due to equipment issues—they all say how much they value the program.

Looking at usage across sites, the Senior Center and the park with the pool are the most heavily used. The library location has the lowest usage, which we suspect is due to visibility, and we may look at relocating it. In a good month, we collect 2,500 to 3,000 pounds of food scraps.

Location is critical. One of our units, placed at the edge of a parking lot, was damaged by a snowplow and was out of service for a while. Units need to be accessible but not vulnerable to traffic or weather. Shaded areas help in warm months.

We also learned to invest in good batteries. The mobile app has been a bit challenging for some older residents, especially at the Senior Center. We are considering switching that unit to a keypad entry or adding a dual-access option. We like the app because it ensures committed users, and as a result, we see almost no contamination—just the materials we want.

It is important to provide clear program information and frequent updates. When usage drops, a quick reminder helps bring it back up. Maintaining a strong relationship with our vendor has been critical. They have provided great support, whether for equipment issues caused by residents or during a recent product recall we had not been aware of.

As the program evolves, conditions will change, and we aim to stay adaptable. That is how we continue growing our food scrap program.

Thank you.

Tim Steckel

Thank you, Scott. That was very insightful—thank you for sharing the numbers as well and how the metrics shifted once the program started. Let's continue with Emily Williams from the City of Hailey.

Emily Williams

Hi there. My name is Emily Williams. I am the Grants and Sustainability Coordinator for the City of Hailey. We are a small town in south-central Idaho with just under 10,000 residents. We experience very long winters—typically five months of snow—and we have a significant tourist population. Being just south of the Sun Valley Ski Resort, we see a large influx of visitors year-round for recreation, which creates unique challenges for our waste stream.

Our landfill is located 100 miles away, and organics made up one of the heaviest components of our waste stream. Residents started asking if we could find a way to divert organics both for environmental and economic reasons. It made a lot of sense to try to keep organic waste local rather than trucking it out of the valley.

As a city, we explored several options. Curbside composting came up first, but it was not well received due to the added cost to residents' pickup fees. Many said they already composted at home and would not benefit. So, we kept brainstorming and decided to try a more accessible community food waste collection bin program. We applied for grant funding through the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and were selected.

The bins are open to the public 24/7. People can access them using either an app or a keypad code, which is listed on our website. Our local waste hauler collects the material twice a week to reduce odors. We use large compostable liners in the bins to minimize mess, and that has worked really well. The containers themselves

are 55-gallon carts. We were a little concerned about their weight, but collection has gone smoothly so far.

We started with four bins in our initial order. Three were app-only access, and one used a keypad. We wanted to test both formats in the community. It quickly became clear that the keypad-access bin was by far the most popular. Many residents did not want another app on their phones. While the app is useful—especially because we can contact users if we ever find contamination, which is rare—it turns out most people prefer the convenience of a keypad.

Based on that feedback, we expanded the program. We now have three bins that can be opened using either the app or a PIN code, which has been a great improvement.

We are fortunate that our commercial composter accepts a wide range of materials, including BPI-certified compostable items. Residents really appreciate being able to use compostable liners in their kitchen pails. We do not accept yard waste, which caused some initial frustration in the community, but allowing it would have filled the bins far too quickly.

The program has been a major success. I had budgeted a large portion of our grant funding for outreach, but we ended up diverting most of it into purchasing additional bins because demand was so high. For a city of our size, we were amazed at how much food waste we collected right away.

In terms of outreach, all we did was send out a postcard to every household. The card was bilingual, in English and Spanish, since about 50% of our community is Hispanic. The front of the card showed what the bins looked like, and the back explained how to use them. Additional resources are available on our website, including a list of accepted items. Residents can scan a QR code on each bin that takes them directly to the website with the current access code. We do not offer additional training.

One challenge we encountered was that the 55-gallon bins were too tall for residents using wheelchairs. We worked closely with metroSTOR to develop an ADA-compliant unit, which we installed recently. It has been well received and significantly improves accessibility.

The only other minor issue has been educating residents on how to use the app. My contact information is listed publicly, and I have been able to walk people through the process pretty easily. Once users ensure their Bluetooth is turned on, the app functions smoothly.

Overall, this program has been extremely successful, and we feel very fortunate to have implemented it with grant support. I am happy to answer questions during the Q&A at the end.

Tim Steckel

Thank you very much, Emily. Let's move forward with Michael Heimbach from the City of Coconut Creek.

Michael Heimbach

Good morning, good afternoon, everyone. Thanks for being here. From the comments and previous presentations, I can see that people are in different stages of implementing food waste drop-offs—some are just considering it, others are further along. Here in Coconut Creek, we are moving a little more methodically with our implementation process.

Our city has about 60,000 residents, with around 8,400 single-family homes and another 20,000 multifamily units. Many of the multifamily developments are large, 400-plus unit communities. If you are familiar with Southeast Florida, we are located west of Pompano and northwest of Fort Lauderdale. We are mostly a bedroom community, but despite our size, we have often taken a leadership role in solid waste issues in the county.

Our City Commission has long been committed to processing waste locally. There is an industrial area to our east, and we use those nearby facilities for waste processing, including recycling. We are strongly opposed to landfilling. There is a large regional landfill adjacent to our city, and we deal with significant challenges from it—odors, groundwater concerns, and other environmental impacts.

As a side note, anytime I propose a new program and get the side eye, I like to remind people that "innovative, inclusive, and progressive" is written on the back of all our vehicles. That usually gives me license to promote progressive ideas.

Our neighboring communities have started or are considering drop-off programs, and residents have been approaching commissioners about doing the same. We already had a community composter just outside city limits and a weekend-only recycling drop-off site, which gave us a natural place to pilot a food waste drop-off program.

Like many others, we had concerns about contamination. In my previous role with the City of Gainesville's solid waste department, we used Bigbelly containers for litter and recycling in open areas, so I was already familiar with the value of enclosed containers. We wanted something better than just a basic 96-gallon cart. We needed something secure, visible, and functional.

For the pilot, we limited participation to 50 residents. That number felt manageable and introduced a sense of exclusivity, which we believe has helped with program responsibility and compliance. To participate, residents must read about the program on our website and understand what is and is not accepted. We use keypad-access metroSTOR containers for this.

To set everyone up for success, we provided each participant with a five-gallon bucket for outdoor food scrap storage, a standard two-and-a-half-gallon kitchen caddy, and about 100 compostable liners. When it came to selecting containers, we found metroSTOR to be the obvious choice—not just because of the design and labeling options, but also their flexibility and support.

We posted clear graphics on our website listing acceptable and unacceptable items. Our contractor, a local community composter, is not a fan of compostable packaging, so we only allow compostable plastic bags, no BPI-certified packaging otherwise. However, he does accept food-soiled paper and napkins, which not all programs do. It has been easy for residents to follow.

So far, the results have been excellent. We are receiving very clean material—no contamination. The exclusive nature of the program, combined with strong education and clear expectations, has helped a lot. That said, not all of the 50 participants are actively engaged. Some people took the free buckets but have not started using them. We occasionally hear, "I've been meaning to get started." That has been a bit of a letdown after investing in startup materials.

Currently, we are collecting about 100 pounds of food waste per week. It is not an enormous amount—especially

compared to what I saw in Gainesville, where we collected around 2.5 pounds per household per week—but it is a start. We also added a drop-off point at City Hall so that staff can participate. That participation has grown steadily each week.

Looking ahead, we plan to expand incrementally. Starting this fall, we will open the program to another 50 residents and see how participation develops. We will add another 50 after that, and as demand increases, we will consider adding more sites and more containers.

We are also looking to pilot a program with five large multifamily communities using metroSTOR technology. We have applied for a grant to support that effort and feel optimistic. Our long-term goal is to make food waste diversion mandatory for multifamily housing. That would expand the program to up to 20,000 units and shift some of the operational cost to property managers instead of it being fully city-run.

We are also continuing to explore additional drop-off options. While curbside collection is attractive, it is not cost-effective for us unless we can get it down to around $5 per household, which is difficult to justify.

That wraps up my presentation. My contact information is on the final slide, and I look forward to your questions during the discussion.

Tim Steckel

Thank you, Michael. I think we need to keep moving so we have time for discussion. I will hand this over now to Todd Rothe with Big Lake Organics.

Todd Rothe

Thank you. I am with Big Lake Organics in Ashland, Wisconsin. We are both an organics hauler and a manufacturer of compost. We are located in far northern Wisconsin, about 60 miles east of Duluth, Minnesota, right on Lake Superior.

We currently have nine metroSTOR units in seven locations. Six of those use app-based access, and three use keypads. From the beginning, we wanted to test both formats to see which worked better in our area, and it is a mixed result.

To give some background, we have only been using the metroSTOR units for about a year. We inherited a community composting program that was essentially a free-for-all, with open drop points where any household could bring food scraps. It quickly became contaminated with yard debris and other waste, creating pest issues and becoming an eyesore. Since implementing the metroSTOR units, we have completely eliminated those problems.

We located the units in high-traffic areas. One is placed at the entrance to a grocery store, making it very convenient. Others are at a local college and a health clinic, which is surrounded by office buildings. That health clinic site has been especially successful, as people bring food scraps to the unit when they come to work.

We are in a very rural area, with a total urban population of about 12,000 to 14,000, spread across a 60-mile area. Our trucks run routes three times a week and cover a lot of ground. We also have a high tourist population, so we structured our subscriptions to accommodate seasonal residents. People can activate their subscription

in the summer and pause it when they leave in the fall. Our billing is monthly, on a 30-day cycle, which offers flexibility.

Like others have mentioned, curbside collection is not cost-effective. We cannot afford the infrastructure or labor to service individual homes, and our focus is on changing the perception of organic waste diversion. It should not be seen as messy or unpleasant. We give subscribers clear instructions for bucket care, use liners, and maintain high standards for cleanliness. On the commercial side, we power wash the interior bins and the metroSTOR units regularly.

Using metroSTOR units allows us to meet customers in the middle—cutting down on miles traveled both by our trucks and by residents. Over the past year, we have gained 114 subscribers. Again, the key to success has been placing units in high-traffic areas and employment centers.

Customer service is critical, especially when onboarding new users. The app takes time to set up, and some people expect it to work immediately after download. I have had people come to my office, and I walk them through their phone settings to make sure the app works properly. I also want to thank the metroSTOR and MetroKey teams—they have been very helpful when we need support.

That said, some of our users do not use apps or even have smartphones. For them, keypad access is essential. It does pose a challenge, as we cannot track usage as precisely as we can with app users, and it is harder to pause their accounts. We rely on the weight of material collected to estimate usage at keypad sites.

Each of our service drivers carries a cleaning kit in the truck and cleans units regularly. That is essential to maintaining positive perceptions. No one wants to approach a food drop-off site with sludge down the side or maggots crawling out of it. Cleanliness encourages continued use.

One of the biggest challenges we face is the perception that composting should be free. We have tried to address this by pricing the service affordably but in a way that still covers our costs. Our subscription is $10 per month. Subscribers receive a four-gallon bucket starter kit, compostable liners, and informational materials on what is acceptable and why food waste diversion is important.

The metroSTOR units have also proven extremely durable. We have a large bear population, along with raccoons, skunks—you name it—and we get four to six feet of snow every winter. These units have held up through all twelve months without issue. We could not be happier and are looking forward to expanding the program to divert even more food waste.

Tim Steckel

Thank you, Todd. Let us stay with you for a moment. A couple of questions came in during your presentation. You answered one—how much the program costs—but someone also asked whether you offer different pricing tiers. Could you speak to that and also to how you structured your pricing?

Todd Rothe

Yes. We only offer one tier. The residential subscription is $10 per month. With that, subscribers receive a four-gallon bucket, liner bags, and a printed guide explaining what can and cannot be added to their household bucket, along with more information on the value of food waste diversion. That $10 price point is just above break-even for us.

I worked the numbers backwards. For example, if I send out a driver making $18 per hour, plus account for workers' comp, insurance, fuel, and overhead, that $10 covers our basic costs. We are not turning a profit from this service—it is about making the collection of household food waste as affordable and accessible as possible.

Tim Steckel

Do you receive any subsidies or support from your local city or county?

Todd Rothe

We do not. Big Lake Organics is 100% privately funded.

Tim Steckel

Wow. That definitely sets you apart from the other panelists today. With that, I would like to open the floor to more questions, comments, and discussion. If you are in the audience and want to participate, feel free to drop a question in the chat or raise your hand and unmute yourself.

Let me start us off with one that just came in. Eric Flores asked, "What incentives do residents have—or seek—to sign up for a new paid service?" This is a challenge composters everywhere face. Todd, you mentioned the perception that composting should be free. Do you have a particular way of addressing this when you speak with potential customers?

Todd Rothe

I am very transparent when people inquire. Right away, I explain that at Big Lake Organics, we believe in paying our employees well. The $10 monthly fee we charge simply covers our operational costs—we are not trying to profit from this.

Sometimes we joke that the recycling truck does not show up and leave you a free case of soda or beer, right? What you get is the benefit of reducing methane emissions and contributing to a better future for your grandchildren. That is the real return on investment. We try to frame it as a values-based decision and make the economics clear and honest.

Tim Steckel

Here is a question for all of you. Has anyone had experience with drop-off programs for commercial waste or business districts? Scott, Emily, Michael—yours are just residential, right?

Michael Heimbach

Correct.

Tim Steckel

Have you considered doing a commercial version? Is that something that would be account-based? That is the only model I have seen—I do not know of commercial drop-off programs.

Michael Heimbach

Yes, we are looking at a pilot program for commercial waste, but it would be individual businesses. There is plenty of food waste at the commercial level to fill containers quickly.

Tim Steckel

Would you provide a container for each business, or are you looking at shared stations?

Michael Heimbach

We are planning on one container per business.

Tim Steckel

OK. Let's continue through these questions. Todd, do you allow participants to use their own compostable bags?

Todd Rothe

Yes, but we require that they are BPI-certified bags. An alternative that has worked well for us is a standard kraft paper grocery bag.

Tim Steckel

When you mentioned power washing your stations, I wondered—do you use liners in your drop-off stations?

Todd Rothe

No. We use a 64-gallon toter inside the metroSTOR unit without a liner. It goes straight to our facility where it is emptied and power washed. When we do the exchange, the new toter that goes into the unit is always clean, odor-free, and free of residue. During summer, we increase servicing from once to twice per week to stay ahead of any potential issues.

Tim Steckel

So you're not power washing at the site itself. You bring the toters back and then just clean the rims or any mess on-site?

Todd Rothe

Correct.

Tim Steckel

Thanks for clarifying. Someone asked what the steps are to get these bins approved or registered through your municipalities. What departments were involved, and did you need building permits or anything similar? Emily?

Emily Williams

Sure. Our City Council approved our grant application through a public process, which covered funding. Our bins are located at grocery stores, a community park, City Hall, and the post office. We worked directly with those businesses to get their permission to place the bins. No formal permitting process was needed.

Tim Steckel

Was it similar for you, Scott and Michael?

Scott Atkin

Yes. All our bins are on public, town-owned property, so it was a simple internal process.

Michael Heimbach

Same here. No requirements from the county or state at the volumes we are collecting.

Tim Steckel

So, pretty straightforward overall. Another question: is there any perceived challenge or competition from private solid waste companies that make money from undiverted waste?

Michael Heimbach

No. In fact, because food waste is dense and heavy, removing it from the stream can actually increase a hauler's profit margin. They are not paying tipping fees for the food waste, and the customer may not reduce their garbage service, so it can benefit the hauler.

Emily Williams

Yes, agreed.

Tim Steckel

That makes sense. Todd, you are covering about a 60-mile radius, and for Emily, your landfill is 100 miles away. It may not be noticeable at first when starting with 50 participants, but over time, the impact becomes clearer.

A question came in: what payment platforms are each of you using for billing and subscriptions? I assume this is mainly for Todd, since the other programs are free?

Scott Atkin

Correct, no fees on our end.

Tim Steckel

Todd, can you share how your billing system works?

Todd Rothe

Yes. Subscriptions can be set up directly through our website. Once someone signs up, I receive the request, approve it, and send an email with instructions on downloading the MetroKey app or using the keypad code. I follow up to ensure they are all set. Billing is $10 per month on a 30-day cycle, and subscribers can pause their billing at any time by emailing me or updating their account.

Tim Steckel

And what payment provider are you using?

Todd Rothe

If they sign up online, they can pay via PayPal, Venmo, or credit card. At our office, we also accept Stripe.

Tim Steckel

Thanks. Do you change the keypad access codes regularly, or is it always the same?

Todd Rothe

We do not change the codes frequently. For free municipal programs, that has not been a concern, but I can see how it might be more important for private programs.

Tim Steckel

Thanks. A big thank you to Natalie from Rust Belt Riders, who has been answering questions in the chat and sharing helpful insights. Let's see if we have a few more.

Nigel, I think someone named Miranda has a question. Miranda, would you like to unmute?

Miranda Hotham

Yes, thank you. You've all mentioned the app—what is it called, and did you get access through the bin supplier? Also, for MetroSTOR, is it possible to assign unique codes to individual users to help with tracking for those not using the app?

Tim Steckel

Good question. The app we use is specific to metroSTOR drop-off enclosures. It is not a general-purpose drop-off app, but rather something provided through MetroKey, their access control system.

Nigel Deacon

You can use a single code across all the containers in a scheme, and each container can accept up to four codes. But right now, there is no tracking functionality tied to keypad codes. We are working on expanding those capabilities.

Miranda Hotham

Got it, thank you.

Tim Steckel

This is probably more relevant for private haulers who run paid subscription programs and need tighter access control. For municipalities, a single code works well and avoids confusion.

Todd Rothe

Let me add something quickly. The grocery store site I shared a photo of—we are already collecting commercial food waste from them. So, for locations where our trucks are already servicing a business, we offer a free 32-gallon toter pickup once a week in exchange for allowing us to place a metroSTOR residential unit there. That helps us expand access and start the conversation about organics diversion with their produce departments and other areas.

Tim Steckel

Great strategy. We are nearing the end, but if anyone else wants to jump in now is the time. Otherwise, I will begin to close. Thank you to everyone who joined us today—we had nearly 100 participants. I truly believe we will see more organic waste diversion as a result of discussions like this.

If you have more questions, please reach out to me on LinkedIn, or contact Nigel and his team at metroSTOR. We are happy to help or connect you with additional resources.

One last question before we close—how do you track contamination, and how often do you encounter it? Are you doing any waste auditing?

Scott Atkin

In Manchester, we visually inspect bins twice a week. Our hauler also checks during collections. If we spot contamination, we ramp up outreach efforts, but we cannot identify individual users.

Tim Steckel

So mostly visual. Todd?

Todd Rothe

Every time a unit is serviced, the 64-gallon toter is brought back to our facility. It is weighed, dumped, and we assess contamination at that point. We do not weigh the contamination separately—it just goes into the trash—but we track diversion by weight per unit. Contamination is very low because participants are personally committed. It is much lower than what we see in restaurants or schools.

Tim Steckel

That makes sense. Emily, someone asked how you handle contamination outreach.

Emily Williams

I also check the bins twice a week. If I see something that does not belong, I look up who accessed that bin since the last collection. I send a reminder email to those individuals, using BCC, to reinforce the list of acceptable materials. It is simple and effective, and having the app makes it easy to manage.

Tim Steckel

Sylvia asked if we will share links and resources from the chat. Yes, we will save the chat and summarize it. The metroSTOR team may send out a recap with key resources.

Alex asked: What is a reasonable estimated weight of organics per bin for a high-performing location?

Scott Atkin

We use 65-gallon toters. At our lowest-performing site, we collect about 50 to 60 pounds per week. At our busiest site, we have collected up to 275 pounds in a single pickup—which starts pushing the limits for our collection equipment.

Todd Rothe

Same here. Those numbers are nearly identical to what we see.

Tim Steckel

So, between 50 and 250 pounds per week, depending on the site. We still have many people with us, even going a little over time—which to me shows how engaged and interested everyone is. This is why we do these webinars: to encourage others to start programs, even small, and build from there.

Thank you again to all our speakers—Emily, Michael, Scott, Todd—for sharing your stories. It was incredibly insightful.

Emily Williams

Thank you.

Tim Steckel

Thanks also to everyone who joined us. If you are working on starting your own program, feel free to reach out to me, to Nigel, or to metroSTOR. We are here to support you. Let's make composting mainstream together. Have a great rest of your day.

Nigel Deacon

Excellent. Thank you, everyone.