



CoRR's Role in Expanding Resource Recovery in New York City

The response has been great to [Sunday's New York Times](#) story on recycling in New York City. Not surprisingly, we've been asked a lot of questions about what we do and what more the city can do. Here are some answers.

Why did Global Green start this program in NY?

Global Green's Coalition for Resource Recovery is focused on reducing the commercial sector's waste stream, specifically restaurants and retailers. We started with New York because of the number of restaurants and the magnitude of the waste here. New York has a significant trash and waste problem. Also, because of the price of sending materials to trash to landfill is higher here than it is in much of the rest of the country recycling will actually create savings for the restaurants -- and that is obviously a great place to start.

Why can't NYC mandate all packaging be compostable like San Francisco?

First and foremost, New York City doesn't have the infrastructure to support it and it's irresponsible to call for a certain type of packaging in that circumstance. Developing the infrastructure is the first step; without it, that material will just be sent to a landfill.

What composting options are available to New Yorkers at present for composting food waste and compostable packaging?

There are several composting facilities accepting food waste from some of New York City's restaurants and grocery stores. These include McEnroe Farms in Millerton, NY (102 miles from NYC), New Milford Farms in New Milford, CT (84 miles from NYC), and Peninsula Compost in Wilmington, DE (~130 miles from NYC). We, along with members of Global Green's Coalition for Resource Recovery visited the Peninsula Compost facility a few weeks ago, and a blog post and video on this tour can be seen [here](#).

On the residential side, there are a number of voluntary programs which receive strong participation. A few of these include:

- [GrowNYC](#) - operates 11 Greenmarket drop-off sites for where customers can buy food and drop off their food scraps in the same location.
- [Lower East Side Ecology Center](#) – operates a composting facility in Manhattan that generates compost from food scraps dropped off at Union Square. Compost and potting soil products made from the food scraps also sold at Union Square.
- [Western Queens Compost Initiative](#) – collects food waste at compost to generate support community gardens and urban farms



What are the considerations when developing an organics recovery infrastructure for New York City or another region?

There are a number of considerations that are region specific. The economic viability of a facility depends upon several factors, including:

- Land availability at the appropriate size and cost;
- Demand for compost, energy or other end products;
- Consistent volume and quality (low contamination) of food scraps, otherwise known as feedstock; and
- Location near both feedstock and customers for end product.

The quantity of waste and lack of availability of sufficient land area to treat it, land values, zoning ordinances for New York City and the surrounding region mean that it will have to develop solutions that fit the regional context.

What would it take for New York City to develop a composting infrastructure?

There already are a number of initiatives under way to develop such an infrastructure, and Global Green is playing a leading role. First, a law passed in the summer of 2010 called for the Department of Sanitation, in conjunction with the Mayor's Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability, to recommend methods to expand the diversion of the compostable waste stream. Some of the specific areas of evaluation include the viability of implementing curbside organics collection, the available capacity at composting facilities surrounding New York City, and opportunities to expand capacity at these facilities. Additionally the report will address opportunities to grow and support voluntary composting. The report is scheduled to be completed by July 2012.

What is Global Green doing to facilitate food waste recovery infrastructure for New York City?

To accelerate the development of a reliable, environmentally sound, and economical food waste infrastructure, specifically for the foodservice industry, Global Green seeks to both spur innovation and activity in the private sector to develop needed infrastructure, as well as inform the study the city is developing.

As part of this initiative, Global Green is developing a conceptual plan for recovering the 1,100 tons per day of food waste generated by New York City's accommodation and foodservice sectors. To develop this plan, Global Green is evaluating siting options and operational and environmental attributes of a range of technologies and collection scenarios and regularly convening a diverse group of stakeholders to raise awareness about opportunities and develop solutions to existing challenges. A link to the blog post summarizing our July meeting can be found [here](#), and a meeting announcement for our upcoming conference can be found [here](#).

What else besides compostability and recyclability should be considered when selecting or designing packaging?

We believe that truly sustainable packaging is defined by more than how it is recovered. We use the following definition developed by [GreenBlue's Sustainable Packaging Coalition](#) to guide



how we think about packaging. According to this definition, the ideal sustainable package would have the following characteristics:

- Is beneficial, safe & healthy for individuals and communities throughout its life cycle;
- Meets market criteria for both performance and cost;
- Is sourced, manufactured, transported, and recycled using renewable energy;
- Optimizes the use of renewable or recycled source materials;
- Is manufactured using clean production technologies and best practices;
- Is made from materials healthy in all probable end of life scenarios;
- Is physically designed to optimize materials and energy;
- Is effectively recovered and utilized in biological and/or industrial closed loop cycles.

Isn't compostable food packaging the answer? If so, why is Global Green working on recyclable food packaging?

From a greenhouse gas, energy, and resource consumption perspective, if packaging can be recycled, it generates greater environmental savings than composting. Ideally food packaging could be designed to be both recyclable and compostable thereby creating the greatest opportunity for the value in the packaging to be recovered, and most importantly avoiding the landfill, a source of significant greenhouse gas emissions.

Global Green believes that with the appropriate collaboration of industry partners, solutions for designing and recycling food packaging can be developed. This was the origin of our pilot program.

Aren't paper plates and cups already recycled?

Nationally the recycling rate for paper plates and cups is under 1%, according to EPA data. We have a long way to go. This material in restaurants is not material that has ever been collected. However, there is a strong demand for fiber and that is part of the reason that we are trying to bring the material back onto the market. CoRR's goal is to recycle paper foodservice packaging into valuable, high-quality materials.

We are estimating that there is 2400 tons day going to landfill from New York City's accommodation foodservice and retail sectors-- and that 700 of that is paper materials, not all of which are plates and cups. If we look at that nationally for paper plates, and cups, folding cartons, bags and sacks, that's 4.1 million tons annually.

Why can't we recycle paper from restaurants?

Historically, many mills have had difficulty recycling paper food packaging because of the coatings used and food contamination.



What types of tests have you conducted?

In 2009 Global Green worked with Starbucks testing the feasibility of recycling coffee cups and sleeves in 7 stores. In 2010, Global Green commenced a 3-store pilot with Pret A Manger to not only recycle coffee cups but a range of paper and plastic foodservice packaging items.

What have you learned so far from the pilot program?

Both pilots met established targets to merit additional testing—contamination rates decreased over time and there was no operational burden on the stores. We have also learned that mills that make napkins, the components of a cardboard box, and deinked pulp for making post-consumer cups are interested in further testing the material for suitability with their mills.

What's next for paper food packaging?

Global Green USA is seeking quick service restaurants to participate in a 150-store pilot in New York City. The pilot project will inform the design of a cost-effective, national recycling solution for foodservice packaging. For more information on how to participate, please check out the pilot participation guide [here](#).

Is there a game-changing opportunity for paper foodservice packaging recycling?

While we believe the recycling pilot we have proposed will identify mill outlets for most conventional paper foodservice packaging, the game-changing opportunity is the redesign of paper foodservice packaging utilizing recyclable coatings. Coatings typically used on coffee cups and other packaging, such as polyethylene, are a contaminant to most paper mills. Recyclable coatings are on the market and in use, most notably in the packaging that delivers produce, poultry, and seafood to restaurants and grocers. If paper foodservice packaging could be designed using recyclable coatings, the intensive sorting and mill testing we have planned to identify a recycling solution would not be needed as the packaging could be subsumed by a wide array of paper material streams, both commercial and residential. We hope our work will catalyze this change.

Why did Global Green start with paper food packaging instead of plastics?

While plastic packaging may seem more prevalent than paper packaging to consumers, by weight, paper is the larger item discarded by weight and the opportunity for greatest greenhouse gas savings.

You will find that there are many restaurants use both paper and plastics. That is why we are targeting restaurants that use both of these for our pilot programs going forward. We are having a kick-off meeting for plastics in November to discuss how we can create a full restaurant solution.

The article states that LL19, New York City's law requiring collection and recycling of all household rigid plastics, is contingent on this being able to be done cost effectively. Why?

Many think that there's only seven types of plastics based on resin codes when, in fact, there are many more, including bottle and non-bottle PET, HDPE, and others. Different users of plastics want to buy these plastics in as pure a form as possible. For the sorting facilities to sort



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this material to the desired level of purity, they need to have sufficient volume of each material and a buyer that will pay the price of covering those costs of sorting. For these reasons, Global Green is holding a meeting on plastic food packaging recycling in NYC on November 15th bringing together a number of groups that are actively working on these issues where they can be further explored.

What can the public do?

One of the areas where the public can have the greatest impact is through source reduction. It sounds overly simple, but it's true. To start with: bring your own bags and mugs and containers and select the eco-friendly options on internet delivery orders. Most importantly, the catalyst for all of our work on recycling in restaurants is the customer asking -- or demanding -- change. This is a great way to help turn the tide.