

**New York State
Environmental Investment Program
Technical Assistance Project Summary**

Cayuga Nature Center, Inc.

Project Background

Cayuga Nature Center (CNC) is an environmental education center on Cayuga Lake in Ithaca, NY. Since 1998, CNC has completed several Environmental Investment Program-supported projects that have helped the organization develop a successful food waste composting operation. By the year 2000, CNC was bagging and selling 208 tons of compost per year. Over the next three years, CNC more than tripled the amount of waste it was composting to 728 tons per year. Every step along the way, CNC has been able to improve its efficiency and establish itself as a reputable source of high-quality, locally-produced compost. This most recent technical assistance project enabled CNC to further expand. By July, 2005 CNC hoped to be converting 2,028 tons (1,014 tons per year) of locally-generated food scraps, manure, animal bedding and other organic materials into a value-added product.

Project Description

During the project, local waste hauler Superior Waste stopped picking up food scraps from local restaurants after deciding that it was no longer cost effective to deliver them to CNC's site. To fill the gap, CNC began its own pick-up service, renting a box truck to haul totes full of sorted organics to the compost operation. The service proved profitable for CNC, as the revenues generated from the tip fees more than covered the cost to rent the truck. CNC also re-branded its finished product, calling it "Orgranite" to highlight the presence of granite dust from a nearby mining operation in the compost. CNC continued to market their services to local agri-businesses in order to increase tip fee

revenues and diversify supply, as well as deliver bulk loads of compost to commercial customers and bagged product to local retailers.

Project Results

By the end of the project, CNC was composting food waste collected from local restaurants and Wegman's supermarkets, animal manure, and wood chips at a rate of 789 tons per year (1,577 tons during the project). This generated \$34,489 from the sale of bagged and bulk product, and \$18,191 from tip fees. It also saved area businesses \$47,364 on avoided disposal costs.

The composting program fits well with CNC's mission to educate the community about the environment. It also works well, as CNC is able to provide in-kind support in the form of land, buildings, a truck, and administrative services. Unfortunately, financial analyses of the operation over the last three years indicated that sales and tip fees were still not sufficient to cover operating costs. Concurrently, in July, 2005, it was determined that ESU would no longer continue its longstanding support of CNC's composting program. ESU's support was contingent on the organization's ability to help food waste generators lower their operating costs by diverting their waste from disposal. In reality, only a small portion of the savings from the program was accruing to food waste generators. At this time, the future of CNC's composting program remains uncertain.

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| Contractor: | Cayuga Nature Center |
| County: | Tompkins |
| ESD Region: | Southern Tier |
| ESD Contact: | 518/292-5340 |

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| NYS EIP Investment: | \$ 61,158 |
| Contractor Match: | \$156,739 |
| Total: | \$217,897 |
| Completion Date: | July, 2005 |