

THE DIRT ON COMPOST



What is compost?

Compost is the final product of a managed thermophilic process through which microorganisms break down organic materials into forms suitable for beneficial application to the soil. A well-managed composting process has plenty of oxygen, goes through a high-heat phase that accelerates the natural biodegradation of organic materials and produces a stable form of organic matter that is made up of carbon and nitrogen, contains other important nutrients, and is free of weed seeds and harmful pathogens. Compost is a more complex and stable material than aged manure, mulch, or other organic materials used for agricultural purposes.

Compost is a valuable commodity in the agricultural community. When applied to soil, it enhances water-holding capacity, improves soil structure, enhances beneficial soil biological activity, provides stable, slow-release nutrients, enhances soil carbon sequestration and increases forage and crop production. For environmental and agronomic reasons, it is important to note that the type of nitrogen found in compost (organic N) is not the same as the nitrogen in synthetic fertilizers (inorganic N).

From a climate perspective, compost is a triple win. It increases sequestration (the drawdown of atmospheric carbon into the soil), mitigates emissions from other sources (landfilling, burning or allowing organic materials to rot in ponds or pits, which releases the powerful, short-lived greenhouse gases methane, nitrous oxide and black carbon) and enhances the land's resilience to extreme weather (flooding and drought). Composting can offer an alternative strategy for manure management across the state of California that addresses climate change while meeting the goals of agricultural producers¹.



¹ Adapted from the Marin Carbon Project's webpage on compost.

Compost application increases soil fertility and water holding capacity, providing active solutions for climate change on working lands.

Local Vendors

These suppliers offer certified organic compost as one of their products, or are in the process of developing them. Contact vendors directly to inquire about products and availability. A list of statewide solid waste handling operations, including compost production facilities, can be found at: [SWIS Facility/Site Search \(ca.gov\)](#). The following local vendors offer compost to agricultural producers in Sonoma County:

C&S Waste Solutions (Ukiah, formerly Pacific Organics Solutions): <https://candswaste.com> | (707) 234-6400

Cold Creek Compost (Ukiah):
<https://coldcreekcompost.com> | (707) 485-5966

Napa Recycling (American Canyon):
<https://naparecycling.com> (707) 255-5200

Poncia Fertilizer (Cotati) | (707) 481-8052

WM Redwood (Novato): <https://wmeearthcare.com>
(877) 963-2784

West Marin Compost (Nicasio):
<https://www.westmarincompost.org> | (415) 662-9849

Funding for Compost Application

The following agencies and organizations offer funding incentive programs that support compost application. Participation requires applying, being selected, and entering into a contract with the funder.

California Department of Food and Agriculture's Healthy Soils Incentives Program (grants available each year): <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/healthysouls/IncentivesProgram.html>

Resource Conservation Districts may have funds available. Find your local RCD at: <https://carcd.org/rcds/find/>. If you are located in Sonoma County, see contact information for RCDs below.

Sonoma County Compost Rebate Program:
<https://zerowastesonoma.gov/compost-rebate>

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) (grants available each year). Find your local NRCS office at: <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>

Zero FoodPrint's Restore CA and Compost Connector Programs (grants and rebates available each year): <https://www.zerofoodprint.org/compost>

As of fall 2023, Zero Waste Sonoma is currently offering a 10% rebate on compost purchased from certified vendors (including all of the ones listed here) and spread in Sonoma County. Learn more about the rebate program at: <https://zerowastesonoma.gov/compost-rebate>.





Equipment for Compost Production and Spreading

The following local farm equipment businesses sell loaders, spreaders, and potentially other equipment useful for producing compost on-farm.

Belkorp
(707) 827-9088

Garton Tractor
(707) 586-1790

Pellenc (specializes in over the vine equipment)
(707) 568-7286

Compost Trucking and Spreading Services for Hire

The local vendors listed on the previous page can make arrangements for trucking, and many vineyard management companies also provide spreading services.

Name	Trucking	Spreading	Contact
Hansen Transport	X		(707) 529-1534
Poncía Fertilizer	X	X	(707) 481-8052
Rico Elmorini	X	X	(707) 328-7743
Toby's Trucking	X		(707) 763-3867 If interested in compost brokerage services, contact Anthony Piro at (707) 548-7017

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WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESTORE BALANCE WITHIN THE CARBON CYCLE IN A WAY THAT WILL AMELIORATE CLIMATE CHANGE, BUILD RESILIENCE TO DROUGHT AND INCREASE OUR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY NATURALLY.
Carbon Cycle Institute



Labs for Compost Analytical Tests

Many labs offer compost testing services, which can provide information about the physical and chemical characteristics of the compost and evaluate for use as a soil amendment. These reports provide valuable information on C:N ratio, organic matter content, moisture content, and levels of nutrients or contaminants of concern. Analysis packages vary by lab, and therefore requesting an example report is recommended.

Soil Control Labs, Watsonville, CA

<http://www.controllabs.com/index.htm> | (831) 724-5422

A&L Laboratories, Modesto, CA

<https://al-labs-west.com/> | (209) 529-4080

Dellavalle, Davis, CA

<https://dellavallelab.com/contact/> | (559) 233-6129

Fruit Growers Laboratory, Stockton, CA

<http://www.fglinc.com/> | (209) 942-0182

Anatek Labs, Spokane, WA

(testing for herbicide contamination)

<https://www.anateklabs.com> | (509) 838-3999

If you are purchasing compost from one of the vendors listed, you can contact them to obtain lab reports for their specific products.

Technical Assistance for Compost Application

Sonoma Resource Conservation District

<https://sonomarc.org/> | (707) 569-1448 ext. 112

Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District

<https://goldridgercd.org/> | (707) 823-5244 ext. 15

NRCS- Petaluma Field Office

(707) 794-1242 ext. 107

UC Cooperative Extension Sonoma

<https://cesonoma.ucanr.edu/> | (707) 565-2621

Additional Educational Resources

UC ANR Compost in Rangelands:

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/soils/files/316038.pdf>

CalRecycle Compost Use in Agriculture (includes links to on-farm compost regulations in CA):

<https://calrecycle.ca.gov/Organics/Farming/>

UC ANR Nutrient Management Solutions – Compost:

https://ucanr.edu/sites/Nutrient_Management_Solutions/stateofscience/Compost/

US Composting Council:

<https://www.compostingcouncil.org/>

Compost Research and Education Foundation:

<https://compostfoundation.org/>

On Farm Composting Handbook:

<https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/67142>

Marin Carbon Project compost page:

<https://marincarbonproject.org/compost/>

UC ANR Assessing Compost Quality for Agriculture:

<https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8514.pdf>

Compost Application White Paper for CDFA Healthy Soils Program:

https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/healthysouils/docs/CompostApplicationRate_WhitePaper.pdf

Fibershed Quick Guides to Carbon Farming Practices:

<https://fibershed.org/carbon-farming-practices/>

USDA Climate-Smart Agriculture: Compost Amendments:

https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/WLIC%20Fact%20Sheet%202020_Compost.pdf

How Compost and Cover Crops Sequester Soil Carbon

(Jessica Chiartas, PhD): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-8Uihnwa48>