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Franklin County waste bypasses landfill, enriches soil

By Sue Robinson
Free Press Staff Writer

Twice a week, a truckload of rotten potatoes, bad oranges and other spoiled produce will pull into Patrick Hayes' farm in Enosburg Falls. He'll turn the scraps into rich soil for his organic dairy farm.

The nearby Hannaford supermarket will pay Hayes to take the goods, at half the cost the store had been paying to dump them at the landfill.

Brian Jerose brought them together in a pilot project that he hopes will expand into a countywide composting program. The brush and leaves of Franklin County residents and food waste of restaurants and stores would be reduced to soil.

Jerose, who co-owns Waste Not Resource Solutions, obtained an \$11,400 grant in May 2001 from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. His idea was to adapt the composting programs he'd started with other supermarkets and slaughterhouses in New York and Vermont. Half the grant money paid Jerose for his time and research; the other half paid for transportation, containers and site development.

"This is just the beginning, just to work out the kinks," Jerose said. "I see this as part of an overall network of composting in Franklin County, with the biggest material to be composted to be manure -- eventually."

Franklin County is Vermont's largest dairy county with 38,800 milk cows. The average cow produces 100 to 120 pounds of manure a day. Most dairy farms get rid of their manure by spreading it on their fields. Jerose argues that composting some of this manure with food scraps and other materials will enrich the crops, and keep manure from accidentally slipping into the lake and rivers to boot.

Jerose added, "First, we start with food scraps."

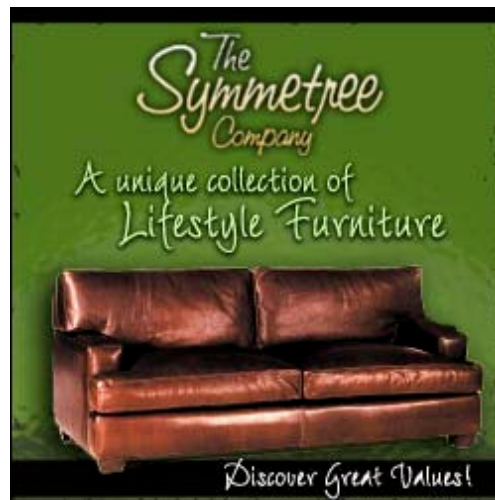
Jerose delivered the first load of Hannaford produce to Hayes on Nov. 11. Twice a week Hannaford packs 10 plastic tote bags -- about 1,000 pounds -- with fruits and vegetables gone bad. On the weekends, stale baked goods are also added to the pile.

Jerose and Hayes split the \$50 a ton that Hannaford pays. The grocery was spending \$100 a ton to ship the produce to the landfill.

"For a company like ours this is going to be a huge savings," Hannaford Food store manager Tom Goss said. "Before, it all went into the landfill, so it's nice to see the waste put to some use."

In addition, the Northwest Solid Waste Management District, which covers 12 towns in Franklin and Grand Isle counties, agreed to bring Hayes leaves and brush from its drop-off sites in St. Albans and Montgomery. The district gives Hayes the 25 cents per plastic bag it charges residents. Hayes has received more than 100 bags.

Hayes will mix the produce and leaves with hay, sawdust and manure in his manure spreader. The spreader will blow the mixture into a composting pile expected to be 8 to 10 feet wide, 5 to 6 feet tall and several



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hundred feet long after several months. The farmer will then occasionally turn the pile to promote the composting process. He might also add worms to hurry the decomposition.

Come summer, Hayes hopes to have a rich, dark soil to spread on his 100 acres of hay crops.

"The food scraps are not organic, but once the compost is formed, that is considered organic," Hayes said. The composting process breaks down any pesticides that had been used on the original product. "I would guess that as a fertilizer, compost is twice as good as regular manure."

Jerosé is trying to have two more farms certified to receive compost materials. Eventually, Hayes, who runs a 70-cow farm, hopes to make enough compost to sell.

"Compost is of interest to anyone who is organic," Hayes said. "It's so rich and dark, and it's got a nice smell. What you're doing is giving back to the land."

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