COMPOST: PROCESS & PRODUCT - Will Brinton, Woods End Research Lab

Notes to accompany the PowerPoint presentation

- **Slide 1:** The more you turn a compost pile, the more C you lose → which leads to more loss of N too
- **Slide 2:** Why are we destroying so much C and letting it go as free heat to the atmosphere?
- **Slide 3:** The formula representing thermophilic compost process is a theoretical formula that doesn’t really happen in nature – this is the mystery of compost!
- **Slide 4:** In-vessel (containerized or “ag bag” operations) are easier to permit and generally have less odor
- **Slide 7:** AAPFCO is the American Association of Plant Food Controls – the good ol’ boys of the compost world.
- **Slide 7:** The federal government has a mandate to adopt private standards rather than develop their own
- **Slide 8:** Some composts produced from entirely food wastes are smelly and produce a phytotoxic product that is too salty for seedlings.
- **Slide 10:** When woody bulk agents are used in compost, the end user needs to have assurance that the raw product is not toxic
- **Slide 12:** When buying compost from commercial sources, look for OMRI-labeled products to be a bit safer (though the OMRI process is only one test/year and lots of paperwork)
- **Slide 13:** Experiment in Maine with composting potato culls: buried plant pathogens in the compost pile and then dug them up and tested them – found amazing levels of pathogen destruction
- **Slide 17:** Compost is distinct from manure in several ways, one of which is that compost concentrates nutrients (and metals too). Phosphorus can be doubled in just 3 months in a compost pile
- **Slide 20:** NOP Rule and compost: the NOP rule gives an example of one way to handle compost, but it’s not the only way. Certifiers decide ultimately how compost must be handled.
- **Slide 20:** Will recommends eliminating the C/N ratio requirements since they are hard to document
- **Slide 22:** UREC is Unavoidable Residual Environmental Contamination

**Question:** What does a grower do if they’ve had crop damage from compost bought from a professional composter? Woods End can help ferret out the source of the problem. Often the case will go to trial; growers have won

*Additional compost discussion from Goranson Farm:*

- If you’re an organic farmer, would you rather put on manure in the fall or compost in the spring? If you’re looking for N, put manure down and plant rye into it for mop-up
- Compost is not a fertilizer – it increases soil Cation Exchange Capacity and is a soil amendment
- Can assess compost maturity with a SolVita test
• Rob doesn’t like soy meal as a fertilizer, but many folks use it almost exclusively – fish meal and soy meal aren’t regulated by certifiers since they’re natural (not blended) materials. NOFA-NY doesn’t allow GMO soymeal however.
• It’s always a good idea to analyze the feedstocks of the compost you’re using