

Compostable Organics Out of Landfill by 2012

Draft Resolution of Support from the San Diego Area Government

WHEREAS landfilling biodegradable materials, such as food, paper, yard trimmings and agricultural products is greatly contributing to global warming.

WHEREAS more than thousands of tons of these biodegradable materials, including paper products, food scraps and yard trimmings, are landfilled in the County of San Diego every day. These materials amount to approximately half of our regions discarded resources, and when buried in a landfill, decompose without oxygen and generate methane, an efficient atmospheric heat-trapping gas and a major factor in climate change.

WHEREAS methane is now understood to be 72 times more potent than CO₂ in causing climate changes over a 20-year period, the amount of time scientists have determined is left before the planet passes the “tipping point” on irreversible climate change. Landfills are the number one source of human-caused methane in the United States and emit the greenhouse gas equivalent of 20 percent of our country’s coal-fired power plants every year.

WHEREAS landfilling any material wastes valuable natural resources. Discarded organic materials contain vast stores of macro- and micro-nutrients needed by agricultural and natural ecosystems to replenish soils. When these materials are not returned to the soil, other nutrient sources must be found. In most cases, petroleum-based and energy-intensive fertilizers are imported and substituted for natural nutrient sources.

WHEREAS commercial farming and shortsighted land use policies favoring energy-intensive pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation water have resulted in dramatic increases in greenhouse gases discharged into the atmosphere for more than fifty years. These practices have contributed to one-third of the increase in atmospheric CO₂, while causing erosion, sedimentation, water pollution and the progressive stripping of organic matter, beneficial microbes, carbon and other essential nutrients from our soils.

WHEREAS, healthy soils are capable of holding twice the carbon stocks of plants. Release of soilbound carbon through tilling and other shortsighted farming practices causes soils to *contribute to*, rather than protect against, global warming. These methods also compromise the ability of soil to grow food locally, nutritiously, and sustainably.

WHEREAS; land degradation is considered a fundamental and persistent problem by the United Nations Environment Programme.

WHEREAS healthy soils restored with organic materials protect against flooding, erosion, drought, promote biodiversity, filter pollutants, buffer soil acidity, and suppress plant diseases and pests while bolstering agricultural yields

WHEREAS San Diego has many organic farms that require the healthier soils that can be produced through diverting organic materials from the landfill and returning the nutrients and organic matter back to farmland to grow its own. This is a critical component of re-creating a more sustainable society in our region.

WHEREAS the quickest and cheapest way to immediately reduce our community’s greenhouse gas emissions and improve the health of soils on the island is to get compostable organics out of landfills and back into our soils through composting and anaerobic digestion technologies.

THEREFORE we agree to phase these materials out of our landfills by 2012, and to redirect these materials back to our soils as useful soil amendments, and ask that staff come back with a plan on how to best accomplish this and how to work with local agencies to encourage the use of compostable organics to sustain the health of our soils.