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On-Site Composting Comes to Morris

Summary: After much planning and preparation, organic waste recycling is now a part of campus sustainability efforts.

(March 8, 2013)-After much planning and preparation, organic waste disposal is now a part of campus-wide sustainability efforts at the University of Minnesota, Morris. In the past, all compostable materials on the Morris campus—food waste and food-soiled paper—were sent off-campus to be incinerated. Two years ago a group of students imagined that, by composting these materials on campus, Morris could avoid a substantial waste hauling fee and create a valuable resource for use in landscaping projects.

In the fall of 2010 former Minnesota GreenCorps member Will Dolezal '12, Minneapolis, environmental economics, dedicated his time and energy to leading a campus-wide conversation on how best to address the large amounts of organic waste produced by the University. By spring of that year Dolezal organized tours of existing composting facilities in Minnesota to gather hands-on knowledge of composting practices.

After Dolezal graduated, a new Minnesota GreenCorps member, Alicia Beattie '13, Hastings, environmental studies and political science, continued the knowledge gathering and relationship building initiated the prior year. Collaborating with Plant Services, Dining Services, Morris Healthy Eating, Minnesota Public Interest Research Group (MPIRG), and Morris Campus Student Association (MCSA), Beattie helped establish a waste-separation system in the Dining Hall to gather data on organic waste output.

After an extensive literature review and many more conversations with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Beattie attended the Midwest Compost School at Iowa State University in July 2012, along with Troy Ostby, recycling director, and Mick Rose, grounds supervisor. By mid-August composting was underway on the Morris campus.

In looking toward the future, Dolezal hoped that there would be “organic collection in the dorms, in [the Turtle Mountain Cafe], in the bathrooms, in the apartments, in all the academic buildings, and so on. In short, all of campus.”

With help from MCSA Sustainability Officers Bryce Blakenfeld '14, Bemidji, and Aaron Goemann '14, Wells, these goals are now coming to fruition. During the 2012-2013 school year, collection of compostable items expanded beyond Dining Services to the Turtle Mountain Cafe and several floors in the residence halls as well as events like the fall picnic, Homecoming, and Community Meal.

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.