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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UMN Morris achieves a million pounds of compost

The University of Minnesota Morris and its sustainability partners throughout Stevens County reached an important milestone recently — one million pounds of organics have been diverted from the landfill and turned into compost.

The composting efforts are part of the campus goal of zero waste to landfill by the year 2025.

The milestone was noted with a celebration on campus on Wednesday, February 16.

In remarks during the campus celebration, UMN Morris sustainability director, Troy Goodnough noted that, “Keeping organic material out of the landfill is important for many reasons. It helps to save money on our campus garbage bills. The process of putting food scraps in a hole also creates methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas and contributes to climate change. Composting material locally also helps turn food scraps into a useful soil amendment. We are moving towards a future where we stop burying our problems and start turning them into solutions.”

Composting efforts on the UMN Morris campus started a decade ago, when waste was collected in tub containers in Turtle Mountain Cafe (TMC). Efforts to collect compostable material expanded from TMC to the dining hall, then to the Student Center, residence halls, and, finally, to most campus buildings.

As part of these initial steps toward developing a campus composting program, UMN Morris facilities management staff worked to develop a cold-weather windrow-composting system. A concrete tipping-and-mixing area was constructed, and Facilities Management found ways to manage waste generated on campus in a good way. The compost generated from the compost pile is used as fertilizer on campus grounds.

The campus dining provider, Sodexo, was an early partner in the composting efforts with its commitment to transition to biodegradable packaging and collection of both serving items plus leftover food scraps for composting. For nearly a decade, UMN Morris students at the Dining

Hall scraped their plates into large containers conspicuously marked "compost." But in 2019, in partnership with Sodexo, the UMN Morris Facilities Management team installed a tub grinder in the Dining Hall. The grinder removes excess water. The chopped material is then sent to a receptacle in the basement and later brought out to the compost piles.

As the composting program advanced, the composting partnerships extended beyond the campus. Facilities Management staff worked to include the Morris Area School District in the zero waste initiative starting in 2017, collecting nearly 100,000 pounds in the first two years.

In 2018, the Morris Model partnership, which includes UMN Morris, the city of Morris, the Morris Area School District, the West Central Research and Outreach Center, Stevens County, the Stevens Community Medical Center, and other partners, identified the need to end landfilling as an important community goal in the Morris Model Strategic Plan.

Goodnough points out that while he's proud of the current sustainable efforts throughout the county, there's still plenty of sustainable work left to be done in the near future.

Notable milestones towards the Zero Waste goal include:

- 2010: UMN Morris partners with MPCA on launching the Minnesota GreenCorps program. UMN Morris student and Minnesota GreenCorps member, Will Dolezal, begins work on a campus composting program.
- 2012: Facilities Management staff members Mick Rose and Troy Ostby and student Alicia Beattie attend 'compost school' in Iowa and begin construction of an on-site cold-weather windrow-composting system. Beattie also serves as a Minnesota GreenCorps service member.
- 2012: Composting tubs are set up in Turtle Mountain Cafe to collect organic waste.
- 2012: Tony Nemmers and Sodexo agree to transition to biodegradable packaging and begin to collect both serving items plus leftover food scraps for composting.
- 2013-2017: Collection of compostable materials extends beyond the dining hall and into the Student Center and across all of campus.
- 2017: UMN Morris teams up with the Morris Area School District to start collecting organics, collecting nearly 100,000 lbs in the first two years.
- 2018: UMN Morris, a lead organizer of the Morris Model, works with partners to develop the Morris Model Strategic Plan, which identifies ending landfilling as an important community goal.
- 2019: In partnership with Sodexo, the UMN Morris Facilities Management team installs a tub grinder in the Dining Hall.
- 2022: UMN Morris reaches one million pounds of organics diverted from the landfill.

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