



Conservation in Washington: Powered by People

MAKING AN IMPACT:

- *Research plots demonstrated yield improvements of 25 percent over conventional nutrient management.*
- *Forty-three percent of participating farmers decided to incorporate compost as part of their regular land management practices.*
- *Participating producers are more precisely managing soil nutrients and reducing risk of nutrient runoff.*

SNOHOMISH CONSERVATION DISTRICT - COMPOST PROJECT DEMONSTRATES SOIL AND YIELD IMPROVEMENTS

Commercial composters in Snohomish County were producing more compost than they were selling, resulting in large stock piles. Meanwhile, local farmers were unsure whether the benefits of using compost to improve soil would outweigh the cost. The Snohomish Conservation District partnered with local farmers, Washington State University (WSU), and commercial composters to develop field research plots and a network of demonstration plots around the county for farmers to witness the benefits of compost.

FINDING A COMMON PATH Several stakeholders worked together on this project to improve nutrient management on farms and increase waste utilization. Snohomish Conservation District recruited farmers to participate and helped implement the research plots on local farms. WSU set up the demonstration sights and crunched the data. And, commercial composters and Snohomish County provided the compost and delivery to farms. Landowners then spread the compost and witnessed first-hand the challenges and benefits of compost on their specific operation.

RESULTS ON THE GROUND This project involved 45 different farms. Over 2,500 yards of compost were spread from three different commercial composters. The research plots demonstrated yield improvements of 25 percent over conventional nutrient management, as well as improved soil quality and reduced disease levels. The producers involved are more precisely managing soil nutrients, allowing for maintained and/or improved yields while reducing risk of nutrient runoff and leaching to the environment. Forty-three percent of farmers have decided to incorporate compost as part of their regular land management practices as a result of their participation in the trials, thereby “fertilizing” a viable market for commercial composters.

WSU is publishing data and producing best management practice (BMP) guides for compost use based on research trial results. And, partners have secured funding to continue this research for the next two years.

Monte Marti, Snohomish Conservation District Manager, said of the project: “Closing the nutrient cycling loop locally by composting local organic waste from local residents, and then spreading that compost back on local farms so they can produce local food, is consistent with the comprehensive approach to resource conservation that Districts promote.”

Right: Pumpkins at Carleton Farm, one of the experimental on-farm research sites. In both 2011 and 2012, pumpkin yield increased when compost was incorporated (COM) compared to business-as-usual (BAU).

