

# MEMO



**To:** Thomas Metzger, National Waste & Recycling Association  
**From:** Viviana Solorzano and Andrew Edwards, Harris Interactive  
**Date:** December 27, 2013  
**Re:** Executive Summary Report – Composting

The following information provides key insights into what Americans think about composting and food waste. You will find some overall thoughts followed by the key findings per question afterwards.

## **Key Findings**

When it comes to composting, there is definitely a sense of how important it is with three-quarters (77%) agreeing they understand the importance of implementing a separate management process for food/waste disposal versus disposing of it with their general household waste. But, while they understand the importance, seven in ten Americans (72%) do not compost at all. Of those who do, 16% compost at home, 9% compost in their community and 4% compost in some other way.

How can we get more Americans to compost? Make it easier as, among those who do not already compost, two-thirds (67%) agree they would be willing to compost their food waste if it was more convenient to do so in their community. And, if there was a program implemented in their community to create another bin for food waste, two-thirds of those who do not compost via a community program (68%) would be willing to manage another bin to separate their food waste from their other waste. Also, among those for who it would be applicable, four in five (79%) would be willing to use gardening fertilizers, mulch and other products from food waste compost in their gardens and/or yards.

So, while there is a large group willing to compost their food waste, or at least separate out and/or use compost in gardening, one thing that would turn this group off is making them pay for it. More than three in five Americans (62%) would not be ok with an increase in the cost of their waste and recycling management, either in the form of a separate fee or an increase in taxes.

**Detailed Findings:**

- 1. Do you/Does your household currently compost your food waste (i.e., do you separate out your household food waste for processing in a household compost pile, or for a community curbside pickup program)? Please select all that apply.**

Among all Americans, one-quarter (25%) say they compost at home (16%) or in their community (9%) while 4% say they compost in some other way. Just over seven in ten Americans (72%) do not compost their food waste.

Younger Americans, those 18-34 and 35-44 (29% each), are more likely to compost at home or in their community than those 55-64 (20%) and those 65 and older (21%).

Those in the West (30%) are more likely to compost at home or in their community than those in the Northeast (23%) and South (21%).

Parents of children under 18 are more likely to compost at home or in their community than those who are not parents with a child under 18 (33% vs. 22%).

*Possible headline – Not composting yet as over seven in ten Americans aren't doing it*

*Products made from composted organic materials (i.e., household food waste and household yard waste) include mulch, compost and other materials added to soil to fertilize plants and improve the soil's physical properties (such as water retention, permeability, water infiltration, drainage, aeration and structure). Composting food and yard waste, provides another purpose to materials that might otherwise be disposed in landfills.*

- 2. Given this, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? – I would be willing to compost my/our food waste if it was more convenient to do so in my community. (n=1,541)**

Among those who do not compost at all right now, two-thirds (67%) agree that they would be willing to compost their food waste if it was more convenient to do so in their community with 24% strongly agreeing and 43% somewhat agreeing with this statement. One-third disagree (33%), with 19% somewhat disagreeing and 13% strongly disagreeing.

Those 18-34 who do not compost (74%) are more likely to agree with this statement than those 55-64 (59%) and those 65 and older (65%).

*Possible headline – Make it easy! Two-thirds of those who do not compost would if it was more convenient in their community*

**3. Given this, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? – I would be willing to use gardening fertilizers, mulch and other products made from food waste compost in my gardens and/or my yard.**

Two-thirds of Americans (67%) agree that they would be willing to use gardening fertilizers, mulch and other products from food waste compost in their gardens or yards with three in ten (31%) strongly agreeing and over one-third (36%) somewhat agreeing. One in five (18%) disagree with this idea and 10% somewhat disagree and 7% strongly disagree; 15% say this isn't applicable to them.

Among those who have gardens or a yard to do this four in five Americans (79%) say they would be willing to use gardening fertilizers, mulch and other products from food waste compost with 37% strongly agreeing and 42% somewhat agreeing. One in five (21%) disagree with this and 12% somewhat disagree while 9% strongly disagree.

Those 45-54 and 65 and older who have gardens/yards are more likely to agree with this statement than those 18-34 (82% and 81% vs. 74% respectively).

Those in the West and South who say this is applicable to them are more likely to agree with this statement than those in the Northeast (82% and 81% vs. 73%).

*Possible headline – Four in five Americans with a place to do so would use gardening fertilizers or mulch from food waste compost in their gardens or yards*

**4. Given this, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? – I understand the importance of implementing a separate management process for food/yard organic material waste, versus disposing of it with my general household waste.**

Over three-quarters of Americans (77%) agree that they understand the importance of implementing a separate management process for food/yard organic material waste versus disposing of it with their general household waste with 32% strongly agreeing and 45% somewhat agreeing while one-quarter (23%) disagree with 14% somewhat disagreeing and 9% strongly disagreeing.

Those in the South (80%) and West (78%) are more likely to agree with this idea than those in the Midwest (72%).

*Possible headline – They may not do it, but three-quarters of Americans understand the importance of implementing a separate process for disposal of food waste versus general household waste*

**5. Given this, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? – Some communities have implemented food waste collection systems that require residents to use a separate bin for food waste, recyclables and other trash. If my community implemented such a program, I would be willing to manage another bin to separate food waste from my other trash. (n=1,899)**

Two-thirds of those who do not compost via community program (68%) agree that if their community implemented a program that required residents to use separate bins for food waste, recyclables and other trash they would be willing to manage another bin to separate their food waste from their other trash with 28% strongly agreeing and 40% somewhat agreeing. One-third (32%) disagree with 17% somewhat disagreeing and 14% strongly disagreeing.

Women who do not compost via a community program are more likely than men who do not to agree that they would manage another bin if their community implemented a program (71% vs. 65%).

Those in the West (71%) and Northeast (74%) are more likely than those in the Midwest (63%) to agree with this idea.

*Possible headline – If the community implements a program, two-thirds of those who do not compost via a community program now would manage another waste bin to separate food waste from household waste*

**6. Given this, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? – I would be ok with an increase in the cost of my waste and recycling management (either in the form of a separate fee or an increase in taxes) if it is necessary to support separate food and yard waste collection.**

But don't make them pay for it, as more than three in five Americans (62%) would not be ok with an increase in the cost of their waste and recycling management, either in the form of a separate fee or an increase in taxes, if it's necessary to support separate food and yard waste collection with almost one-third strongly disagreeing (32%) and 30% somewhat disagreeing. Almost two in five U.S. adults (38%) would be ok with this increase and 10% strongly agree with this idea and 28% somewhat agree.

More than four in five of those 18-34 (43%) and 35-44 (45%) would be ok with an increase in the cost of their waste and recycling management to support separate food and yard waste collection compared to only 27% of those 55-64 and 33% of those 65 and older.

*Possible headline – Americans may be willing to compost and separate, but don't make them pay for it as a large majority would not be ok with an increase in the cost of their waste management*

### **Full Methodology**

This survey was conducted online within the United States between December 19 and 23, 2013 among 2,051 adults aged 18 and older by Harris Interactive on behalf of the National Waste & Recycling Association via its Quick Query omnibus product. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.