

In 2010 the State of Florida Legislature established a 75% recycling goal for the year 2020 with the passage of the Energy, Climate Change, and Economic Security Act of 2008. One objective of the legislation was to increase the 30% recycling goal that was originally mandated in 1988 with the Solid Waste Management Act. There are many options being explored in Florida by counties and cities to increase their recycling rates. Some local governments, including both Alachua County and the City of Gainesville, have instituted "Pay As You Throw" Programs (volume based disposal rates for homeowners using different size carts and automated collection trucks) to decrease disposal and increase household recycling. In addition, ten counties currently dispose of their waste via waste-to-energy-plants as a form of energy recovery from municipal solid waste. The county's Pay As You Throw, (PAYT) program has helped to increase recycling and decrease solid waste disposal significantly. During its first two years, recycling increased by 25% and there was a 14% reduction in tons of solid waste disposed. The PAYT program incentivizes recycling by allowing residents to lower their refuse bill. By recycling as much as possible, residents are often able to reduce their garbage cart size. Four sizes are available. Decreasing the cart size saves money since the rates are based on the cart size needed. An extensive ongoing public education campaign accompanies the PAYT program. In addition to promoting recycling, segments of the campaign provide education for and promotion of backyard composting. Together, the PAYT collection program and extensive public education were vital in enabling Alachua County to reach 50% recycling in 2011.

A major component of the county's waste stream is "organic waste". The word "organic" has many meanings and is used in many different contexts. The "organic waste" stream is defined in this instance as "putrescible waste" such as paper, cardboard, yard waste, food waste, garden waste, animal waste, and biosolids/sludges from waste water treatment plants. In Alachua County, "organic waste" contributes approximately 50% by weight of the waste disposed of by residential households. This report used two surveys, both conducted by the Hinkley Center for Solid and Hazardous Waste Management. The first of these surveys was the Alachua County Composter Sale Survey and was limited to residences that had purchased Earth Machine™ composters for which the County had receipts that contained the telephone number of the party who had purchased the Earth Machine. The second survey, the Random Phone Survey, focused on capturing the overall state of residential composting within Alachua County. As expected, the composting rate and participation rate of the residents contacted as part of the Composter Sale Survey were much higher compared to the Random Phone Survey. In addition, the results of the Random Phone Survey show that a high number of residences are helping to divert yard waste and food waste from the county collection by the county's contracted waste hauler. When one accounts for the amount of yard waste and food waste that is not placed at the curb due to "backyard composting", the recycling rate in Alachua County increases from 55.2% to 58.7% (an increase of 3.5%).

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