

Composting success at Focus on Farming

The focus may have been on farming at the 2014 Focus on Farming conference, but it was also on sustainability. For the first time in the conference's 11-year history, all the tableware – from plates to utensils to cups – was 100 percent compostable thanks to a donation from Cedar Grove, located in Everett.

Cedar Grove has played an active part in Focus on Farming for many years, and this year, the company wanted to take it one step further. Casey Funke of Cedar Grove coordinated the effort, with the goal of making sustainability as simple as possible for conference attendees.

“When you’re at an event, that’s the last thing you’re thinking about – where do I put my food scraps,” Funke said. “We know that. We wanted to make that decision easy for people. Don’t think about the sorting, recycling or putting cups, plates and leftover food in the garbage. You just enjoy the event. If you’re getting food or coffee or whatever, because all of the food packaging is compostable, you have one place to put it and that’s the compost bin.”

He said the company has always been part of the farming community in Snohomish County. It was a natural progression to go from simply participating in the Focus on Farming trade show to making the event itself more sustainable by providing the sustainable food packaging items and collection, ultimately creating a farm-to-table and table-to-farm event through recycling.



Making compost

After being delivered to Cedar Grove for processing, the “feedstocks” – food and yard scraps – are unloaded into a row, sorted to remove plastic and metal, mixed with specific amounts of “browns” (woody yard scraps – with a higher carbon content) and “greens” (grass, food scraps with a higher nitrogen content), and then ground up.

The mix is put in long piles under covers and ventilated to keep the content balanced and provide oxygen to the aerobic microbes. The piles are covered and left for three or four weeks to heat up. Then the covers are lifted and material is moved and recovered for another two weeks. After those two weeks, the material is moved again for another two-week stage. Finally, the piles are screened and it is officially compost!

Before getting packaged for consumers, the compost is tested to make sure it is safe – no dangerous chemicals or bacteria that could make people sick. You can read more on the [Cedar Grove website FAQ section](#).

“Cedar Grove supports a closed loop recycling model in Snohomish County, enabling the county to recycle organic resources in the community where they are generated and ensuring that compost is available to Snohomish County farms and local residents to grow healthy food,” Funke said.

In an ideal situation, Funke said, the produce you buy at your local store or restaurant would come from a farm in the area. Then the peels and rinds from that produce would go into your compost bin and eventually wind up at Cedar Grove, where they would be processed into compost and then used by local farmers or gardeners.

The organic material from Focus on Farming, in this case, could wind up back in local fields or gardens by next summer. Cedar Grove transported all the compostable materials to its Everett facility for processing.

Funke said Cedar Grove hopes to continue the sustainability trend at next year’s Focus on Farming conference, too.

“After doing it this year, we have a better idea what to expect – and can maybe further our goals of making it a zero-waste event,” he said.

See highlights from the 2014 Focus on Farming conference online at www.snohomishcountywa.gov/2749.

Visit www.cedar-grove.com to learn more about Cedar Grove Compost.