

IMPACT

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Recycling at the Fair program educates the community and reduces costs

AT A GLANCE

Recycling of municipal solid wastes in rural communities is a challenge. Recycling at the Fair demonstrated the positive community response when offered a recycling option.

The Situation

Like many other rural communities, Gooding County struggles to establish and sustain municipal solid wastes (MSW) recycling programs and to educate the community about recycling implementation. The most important factors influencing the adoption of recycling programs include economics, distance to bulk recycling collection facilities, distance to community collection centers and cost of establishing and maintaining multi-point collection areas. Lack of education in the community regarding recycling costs and benefits may play an important role too. The annual Gooding County Fair and Rodeo was identified as the single most important annual event in the county where there is a generation of solid wastes similar to MSW, and with great potential for establishing a recycling program that can benefit the event and serve as an example to show the possibilities of recycling at the community level.

Our Response

The Gooding County Ag Extension educator obtained a grant to develop community environmental education strategies in Gooding. A fraction of that grant was used to develop the Fair Recycling Program with the intent to demonstrate that recycling in a small rural community can be viable, and to educate fair goers about the benefits and challenges of recycling MSW. A set of recycling barrels was built using discarded 55-gallon PVC barrels donated by a



Roger Johnson and volunteer youth he recruited to help with the recycling program in 2015. Photo by Mario E. de Haro-Marti.

local dairy. Idaho Master Composter & Recycler (MCR) volunteers, a program implemented by the author, helped build and establish the recycling program. Recyclables received by the program included aluminum cans, plastic containers (bottles, cups, etc.) and cardboard. The local recycling company provided collection bins and pick-up service at no cost. MCR volunteers and students from the Gooding High School helped to collect data during the first years of the program to assess recycling and garbage contamination percentages as well as to establish the operational dynamics. Volunteers from youth groups have been helping with the daily pick up and placing of the system and with data collection every year.

Program Outcomes

The program has been running for nine years, recycling approximately 4,530 pounds of recyclables during that time. An average of 264 cubic feet per year of recyclables have been diverted from the MSW

stream. The diversion of recyclables' materials help to reduce the cost of handling fair wastes. Diverting these materials, cardboard and large plastic containers in particular, have a reduction factor of three to five times the volume of recyclables collected in the number of garbage cans used at the fair. This is because the program encourages people to disassemble boxes before disposal and separates such boxes and bulky plastics from the waste stream. Considering a multiplication factor of four, the average of 264 ft. per year diverted translates to a reduction of seven 300-gallon municipal garbage cans, or twenty one 95-gallon garbage carts, needed during fair time. Another highlight of the program metrics includes the achievement of a recycling rate of at least 70 percent of possible recyclable materials. Overall garbage contamination in the system was 17 percent by weight (insignificant by volume). These metrics are very encouraging in a community that doesn't have a household pick-up recycling program or established community recycling education, indicating that the community really appreciated and responded positively to the implementation of the Recycling at the Fair program. Figure 2 shows the weights per type of materials and per year collected during each fair period. The program has successfully helped to reduce the amount of mixed wastes sent to the landfill from the fair. The program has also encouraged community members, especially youth, to participate through volunteer activities. During the rest of the year, the University of Idaho Extension office maintains a couple of barrels at their meeting facilities. Community members bring some of their recyclables on a regular basis, especially plastics and disposable batteries. Praise for the program has come from diverse community members up to rodeo participants who expressed their appreciation for the recycling and educational efforts in Gooding County.

The Future

Throughout the years that the program has been running, the fair and rodeo events have grown slowly but steadily in number of attendees. The recycling program is near its maximum capacity, and even when it is still very effective, an expansion in the number of recycling barrels needs to be addressed. Recycling of used cooking oil from food vendors is another possible addition in the future that will further reduce the generation of mixed waste during fair. Under ideal conditions, the recycling program would be incorporated as part of the fair waste management operations, to reduce the dependence on volunteers for running the program.

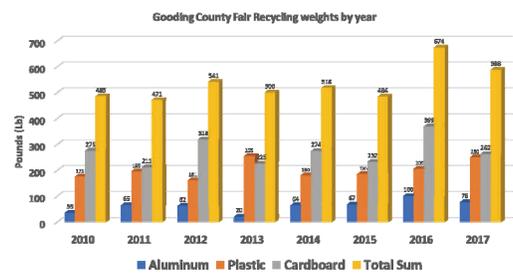
An additional project envisioned, includes building a custom-made trailer to transport the recycling system and the receiving containers to other smaller and more distant county fairs so the system can be used at multiple fairs during the year.

This concept project hasn't being able to obtain funding yet.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

The implementation and annual operation of the Recycling at the Fair program has been possible only because strong groups of volunteers from the community have been helping from the building of the system up to the yearly operation. The author wants to thanks all the groups, companies and individuals that made the recycling program possible. In particular, a special thanks goes to United Metals recycling company, who has provided collection bins and pick-up service for the program at no cost every year. Roger and Sue Johnson have helped by organizing and directing youth volunteers for the program every year since its implementation. Gooding High School Honor Society students helped with data collection during the first years of the program. Without all these volunteers valuable help this program wouldn't be possible in its actual form.

To all of them, Thank You!



Gooding County Fair recyclables weight by year and type of recycled material.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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