

# CELEBRATE KINGS: *Pride in our people, places & products*

## ***Green cart to garden - the route from food waste to compost!***

For most Valley residents, putting food waste in the green cart and hauling it to roadside has become routine. But have you ever given thought to what happens once the truck hauls your compost away?

In Kings County's Dempsey Corner, north of Aylesford, is Northridge Farms N.S. Limited, the end site for compost material received by Valley Waste Management, local towns, and commercial operations.

Northridge Farms is a family affair run by brothers Dwight, Paul, and Robin Horsnell, with their mother Dorothy as bookkeeper. Until eight years ago, it operated as a dairy farm. The switch from cows to composting started after Dwight attended a session on composting at a farmers' conference. The idea piqued his

interest, and he shared his thoughts with his late father, Eric.

"Through my dad's experience as a municipal councilor, he had learned a lot about composting," says Dwight. "He fully supported the idea." And so did Valley Waste Management. The Horsnells sold their cows and went into the composting business.

Soon Northridge Farms grew into a full family business with the addition of Paul and Robin. The family studied other operations to determine the best facility for them and their land, and the sons took specialized courses.

Because of municipal zoning regulations and needed environmental studies, it took two years before they were ready for operation. Environmental testing, especially of

water, remains a regular part of the business.

The only visible signs of the composting operation are three large white and green dome-shaped buildings. "We use these buildings for the composting process," says Dwight. "That process begins when haulers dump the material in the first building." Each client pays a tipping fee to the farm.

Once dumped, compost material is run up a conveyor and across a sorting line. A large magnet attracts metals, and a worker picks out non-compostable items. The rest passes through a shredder, reducing everything to a three-quarter inch size. The material goes into a bin heated to 40-60 degrees Celsius to kill harmful pathogens, and is continually injected with air to feed microbes that break down the cellulose in food waste.

After a week, the compost is moved to break up microbe colonies and undergoes another heating process, known as an environmental check or flip. This is repeated once more before it is moved to

the second building, where it stays up to three weeks for another environmental check.

The third building then hosts the compost for up to eight weeks. To get rid of remaining plastics, the compost is put through a screening and sizing process.

"A big problem for us is plastic in the compost - it gets hidden," says Dwight. His mother, Dorothy, adds, "Plastic doesn't look very good planted in the gardens!"

In the final step, the material is trucked offsite to another family property where it remains up to 18 months before bulk sale to nurseries, landscapers, farms, and the public. The final product is rich in nutrients, has little smell and resembles dark earth.

So next time you haul your green cart to roadside, remember it is just the beginning of the composting process. And when you see a beautiful garden or green field, remember your compost may have helped it grow!

*Story and photo by Marlene Huntley*



*Paul, Dwight and Robin Horsnell stand in front of the conveyor and sorting line, the start of the composting process.*



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