insidewasteweekly
A WME publication

The organic base

Tuesday, 19 January 2010

As Australia's waste industry gears up for 2010, the president of Revolve - Canberra, Gerry Gillespie, urges people to focus on the root issues of organic waste management. He argues valuable organic materials must be returned to soils, and experience shows this can be done very effectively when communities are empowered to become part of local solutions.

Every individual, regardless of their social standing, produces organic waste as long as they continue to eat.

Photo courtesy of Stockxpert.

The true value of this product, both in terms of its nutrient value and its value as a catalyst for the soil to generate more food, has never truly been capitalised on in western society. It is only in Asian communities that the true value of returning organic materials to soils has been appreciated and developed.

Yet even in western societies, where the public (with the exception of gardeners) has long been seen as ignorant of the value of this material, a substantial shift has begun to take place with the advent of new programs focussed on food.

For the first time in its modern history, western society has begun to truly look at its waste organic outputs. In the first instances this was mainly from the western perspective of wasted food as a waste of money, but now also and more importantly, for its value to the food chain.

This in turn has lead to a consideration of the value of clean, quality organic products as a catalyst in the production of quality food from quality soil.

The Groundswell project in NSW has clearly demonstrated that, given the right tools and information to act, the public will respond with enthusiasm to the collection of food waste for reuse in agriculture.

This project, using the City to Soil collection system, has demonstrated that at our very animal base we fully grasp the importance of soil as our mother, in the sense that it feeds and clothes us.

As individuals, parents and grandparents, we see that the security of future generations is firmly based in the soil.

The response to this project has seen the collections of organic waste with extremely low contamination rates of less than 0.5%.

This project has clearly demonstrated the public wants to be involved. Indeed it has demonstrated the collection of organic waste, once it is embraced by the community, will not only empower them to become part of the solution but will also provide the basis for a link into a much bigger picture of behavioural change.

Compost and carbon

In developing the City to Soil process, the project managers needed to reduce the cost of compost manufacture and so designed a new system where the organic waste requires no shredding and very little turning. This process importantly also produces no odour.

Material is sprayed with water and a two part biological inoculant, covered with tarpaulins and left for six weeks without turning. The material can achieve temperatures in excess of 70 degrees in the first week. It then settles back to around 55 degrees for the remainder of the process.

The material produced in this compost process, returned to the soil, provides the basis for supported land management change which dramatically reduces fertiliser use, improves moisture retention water in soils, increases yield and increases soil carbon.

If the legacy emissions currently in the atmosphere are to be addressed, improving our soils worldwide is the only way of doing it.

While climate change may be the largest threat we have brought upon humanity, the generation of carbon in agricultural soils and the opportunities for change that it brings could be one of the greatest benefits humanity has ever given to the world.

We have at our fingertips the means to end poverty, we have at our fingertips the means to feed the world, we have at our fingertips the means for a new world economy.

This new direction, this new hope, is based on the simplest and most disregarded of the products of humanity – our organic waste.

Source-separated organic waste provides the tools to link the community back to its food supply, it provides the tools for us to rebuild our relationship with out soils, it provides the means to support local regional economies.

The only thing we need to do to be part of this great revolution is to maintain ownership of our own organic waste.

Conclusion
The greed of the global economy has forgotten that you can't have a labourer in China make cheap clothes for the world market without food. And you can't feed that labourer without soil. The global economy has forgotten that it is nothing without soil.

Every cheap shirt, every cheap car, every cheap tool, represents some part of a nation's soil. We are nothing without soil. We don't exist without soil.

Peak phosphorus spells the death of chemical agriculture. There is a new way. There is a better way – for humanity and for the planet.

Owning your organic wastes in your home and in your community provides you with the power to help local farmers produce food and to generate local wealth in the emerging carbon market.

No economy, rich or poor, exists without food – because no economy rich or poor exists without soil. The soil is your mother – you are nothing without your mother.

The issues of 'peak oil', of 'peak phosphorus' and other matters of assumed criticality are all indicators of our humble human need to replace one problem with another by addressing only the symptoms of our disease.

In the same way that 'peak oil' tells us that we have been too reliant on an unsustainable supply of oil, 'peak phosphorus' tells us that we have relied for too long on industrial chemical farming.

Good quality soil and soil carbon can provide humanity with the direct link back to its very basic roots. It can be part of our individual responsibility to ensure that the farmers are given the right tools and the capacity to utilise their soil based on the experiential management skills of themselves and past generations.

In linking personal behaviour with soil carbon we will be weaving the tapestry of soil quality into the reality of our daily existence.

To achieve this we need to have a community understanding and response to the ability to grow our soils.

The only place this can be achieved is on the farm. It is that same place that grows our food and is the home and heart of our repeatable economic base.

In the world voluntary carbon market we have been presented with the first opportunity in human history to include our environment in our economy.

We as humans have finally reached that same point that every monkey, bird and bee awoke to as it was born new into its circumstance, its natural economy. Every species lives within its economy because to do otherwise is to perish. We can now join the evolution of economy by including the obvious in our accounts.

Everything we now do and make can be predicated on its carbon value. You as an individual in this place are at this exciting starting point. We must begin.

In 2010 each issue of *Inside Waste* magazine will focus on a different "theme," with organic waste management to be covered in the Jan/Feb issue. For the full list of

upcoming themes and "product profile" topics, please download our 2010 media kit by clicking HERE.

Aspermont Limited
Street Address613-619 Wellington Street, Perth WA Australia 6000
Postal Address PO Box 78, Leederville, WA Australia 6902
Head Office Tel +61 8 6263 9100 **Head Office Fax** +61 8 6263 9148
e-mail contact@aspermont.com **website** www.aspermont.com **ABN** 66 000 375 048