

Compost Champion Expansion Project

SUSTAIN 3S03: Implementing Sustainable Change



Nicholas Shin assessing water refill station at Peter George Centre for Living and Learning.
Photo Credit: Nabil Rajput

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Overview

Approximately 40% of food produced in Canada each year is wasted.[1] If not properly composted, it will likely end up in landfill. Without oxygen, food waste in landfills produces methane, a powerful greenhouse gas that is more effective than carbon dioxide at retaining heat in the atmosphere.[2] Composting uses aerobic decomposition and thus is a tool to help to combat climate change.[3]

At McMaster, about 20% of food waste ends up in landfills.[4] The McMaster Composting Champions program was developed to support staff in leading composting efforts across campus.[5] The goal of our project was to assess the effectiveness of the program from a student's perspective and report findings for further enhancement.

Objectives

1. Pilot the online composting system from a student perspective
2. Consult student clubs to gather their perspectives on Composting Champions Program
3. Report findings and recommendations

Reporting

To achieve our first objective, we piloted the online system, aiming to submit a request to "Become a Composting Champion." Knowingly, the initial program and online form were developed for use by McMaster staff. As students, we were able to identify where the program's theoretical potential could not as effectively be realized by an aspiring student Composting Champion. For example, the McMaster work order system, used to process requests, is only available to students who are also McMaster staff. Many student club leaders would not be able to sign up without being staff or having a staff champion's support. The Composting Champions website could recommend students work with a staff champion to complete the form.

To achieve our second objective, we reached out to 10 McMaster student clubs, who we had personal connections with and knew hosted meetings and events with food, to gauge their interest in the Composting Champions program. Club representatives expressed concerns regarding volunteer commitment, time, and logistics, and seemed overwhelmed with the formality of the program. The website could clarify that anyone wanting to facilitate composting could use their own composting bin and compost when and when it was appropriate for them to do so.

To achieve our third objective, we presented our findings and recommendations to our Community Project Champions. In addition, we drafted the project description for the next SUSTAIN 3S03 student cohort to support the continuity and further enhancement of McMaster's Composting Champions program with the goal of engaging students and student clubs.

Collaborators

We are thankful to our Community Project Champions, Carlos Figueira and David Cano, for their continuous guidance and support throughout our project. We would like to thank Dr. Kate Whalen and Nathan Butterworth for their mentorship and assisting us in solidifying our objectives. We wish to thank our course instructor, Liana Bontempo, and teaching assistant, Rebecca Smith, for guiding our project and course deliverables. This project would not have achieved the success it did without the helpful feedback from dedicated student club leaders committed to making a difference.



References

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