



Down to Brass Tacks

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BRASS TACKS INITIATIVE



Somerset Industries owner (and father), Eric Ihlenfeld, with the next generation of AD advocates. Image courtesy Eric Ihlenfeld

Business Spotlight: Somerset Industries

TURNING WASTE INTO CLEAN ENERGY.

Somerset Industries provides a valuable service to farmers, food producers, and households across the country. How do they do this? By working with anaerobic digester facilities to manage their feedstocks which turns food waste and agricultural byproducts into clean energy and fertilizer.

An anaerobic digestion works by breaking down the organic matter into its basic elements. The process takes place in large tanks called digesters where bacteria break down the organic matter into biogas and biofertilizer. Biogas is then used as fuel for heating or electricity generation while biofertilizer is used on crops as fertilizer or compost for soil enrichment purposes.

The benefits of anaerobic digestion are many, including reduced greenhouse gas emissions; improved energy efficiency, energy independence; potentially reduced waste disposal costs; improved water *(continued on page 3)*

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Contact us:

info@thebrasstacks.org
P.O. Box 192
New Prague, MN 56071
www.thebrasstacks.org

Compost drop-off site coming to New Prague!

The City of New Prague will be opening a new drop-off site for household organic waste by Fall 2023. New Prague will be the fifth city to participate in the Scott County Household Organics program but will be the first open to both Scott and Le Sueur County residents.

The process started in October of 2022 when planning department staff met with BTI Executive Director, Rachel Houck, to discuss the possibility of opening a site in New Prague and the funding sources that were available at that time. As a Scott County-New Prague resident, Houck has used sites in Jordan and Shakopee *(continued on page 2)*

for her household organic waste since February of 2022. During the meeting, Houck relayed how the program has benefited her family, “it has really helped my family cut down on the amount of material we send to the landfill,” says Houck. “It is just a shame that half of New Prague is unable to participate because they live on the wrong side of Main Street.” Houck pointed out that although there are four other sites in the county, they were only available for Scott County residents. The only way for all of New Prague to be included was for a city-owned site to open.

Following this meeting, Kyra Chapman and Ken Ondich of the city's planning department, and Matt Rynda of public works, began researching the feasibility of such a site. They, along with other city officials, determined that the new site would fit within the current vision and budget of the city. “The City just became a Tree City USA and this organics site further shows that New Prague is trying to be more mindful of sustainability and the environment,” says Chapman.

Chapman worked closely with Nick Reishus at Scott County to obtain a grant that would cover all the costs associated with opening the site. The \$20,677.72 grant will cover the construction of a privacy fence around the organics bin, new signage, master lock and keys, camera system, and hauling for three years. Each year, the city



Left to Right: Planner Kyra Chapman, BTI Executive Director Rachel Houck, and City Planning/Community Development Director Ken Ondich.

must provide an annual grant report on the number of tons collected and the number of participants to Scott County—and all county residents must be allowed to use this site at no extra cost to the individuals.

To receive an access key for the site, individuals will need to register their name, address, phone number, and email at City Hall.

More information will be posted on the city website and Facebook page as well as in the city newsletter as it becomes available.

“We look forward to seeing as many residents as possible participate in this program,” says Ken Ondich, Planning/Community Development Director.



The future site of the New Prague organics drop-off site within the existing yard waste site. The new organics site will be fenced in and padlocked to control access. Image courtesy City of New Prague

BTI Business Spotlight: Somerset Industries

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quality; improved air quality; nutrient recycling for agriculture purposes, and more.

Anaerobic digesters need a constant supply of feedstock (usually organic waste) to keep the reactor functioning. However, sourcing and managing that feedstock can be overwhelming for plant managers. Somerset Industries was founded to help ease some of this burden by helping manage feedstock for anaerobic digester plants. Somerset connects farmers and food processors to digestion sites, making use of byproducts that would normally go to waste and also finding outlets for the byproducts of the digester itself.

Eric Ihlenfeld had an extensive career working in various parts of the food supply chain before starting at Somerset including managing the operations of a fertilizer and chemical company during college, managing numerous locations for Archer Daniels Midland, and managing the anaerobic digestion site Hometown Bioenergy in Le Sueur, MN. "Having worked in various parts of the industry, I realized that anaerobic digestion wasn't a widely known technology and outlet for many food producers," says Ihlenfeld. "This is a growing field that's attracting more attention from food production

facilities, investors and municipalities as an effective and sustainable way to manage organic waste."

According to Ihlenfeld, there are other benefits to anaerobic digestors besides just capturing GHGs and creating bioenergy. "If producers have KPI's to meet, an AD facility will help keep that product out of the landfill and upcycle the material from typical wastewater treatment plants, or land applications. It can also be a cheaper cost for disposal than other waste outlets." Farmers benefit from AD facilities because a byproduct of the digestion process is a nutrient-rich liquid fertilizer which is cheaper than other commercial fertilizers and contains no environmentally harmful characteristics.

Even though this technology solves many problems, according to Ihlenfeld there are still challenges to overcome, "finding customers, finding outlets, working with both, and making sure the waste stream meets the expectation of the feedstock that runs the digesters." These challenges are likely not going away soon and according to Ihlenfeld, Somerset has set a goal, "There are always more products out there, helping clients become sustainable is the goal! Not just 1 or 10 but helping as many as possible."

For more information on Somerset Industries contact Eric Ihlenfeld via LinkedIn at [@eric-ihlenfeld](#)



APRIL IS VOLUNTEER MONTH

The Brass Tacks Initiative is seeking volunteers for the following committees to help us continue our mission to support sustainable practices in the food stream through research, education, and collaboration.

Marketing

Establishing, maintaining, and growing the visibility of the BTI. Helps promote our programs, products, and services.

Development

Helps BTI achieve its mission by developing new resources and funding opportunities for the organization.

Outreach/Education

Plans and implements educational events that inform and engage communities on sustainability in the food system.

For more information visit our website www.thebrasstacks.org/volunteer or email Rachel@thebrasstacks.org

About BTI

The Brass Tacks Initiative is a 501c3 nonprofit founded on a mission to support sustainability in the food stream through research, education, and collaboration.

Our name comes from the phrase "let's get down to brass tacks." The phrase means to address the most important facts of a project or problem. The fact is food waste is a problem with environmental, economic, and social impacts. We believe the only way to make an impact on food waste is to **research** best practices and new methods of recycling, **collaborate** with the companies who are generating waste to find alternatives to the landfill, and make sure that current and future leaders are equipped with the **education** needed to make sustainable impacts in their community.

For more information about BTI visit our website www.thebrasstacks.org or contact us via email at info@thebrasstacks.org.