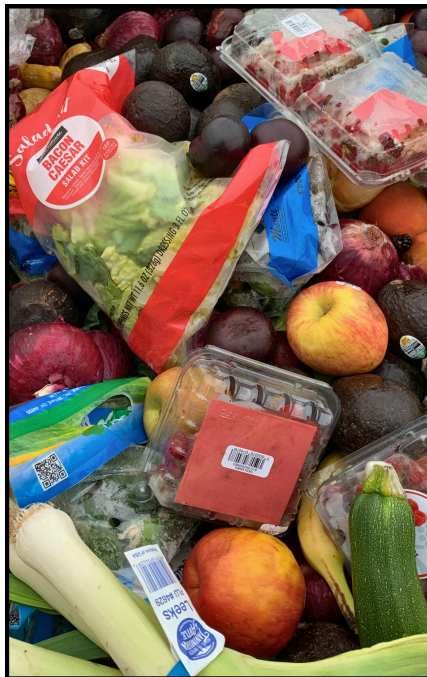




Down to Brass Tacks

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BRASS TACKS INITIATIVE



Spoiled packaged food before being processed in a depackaging unit.
(Courtesy Innovative Waste Recycling).

Depackaging - What is it and How is it Sustainable?

Written by Todd Fischer

Walk down any aisle of your local grocery store, and you will see row after row of foods in brightly colored boxes, bags, and wraps. This packaging is necessary to preserve the quality of the food, protect it during shipping, and keep away outside contaminants. However, packaging can also hinder recycling and composting efforts. Depackaging, a little-known process that involves separating organic materials from their packages, is critical in reducing landfill waste and increasing resource recovery efforts.

The Benefits of Organics Depackaging

The primary advantage of organic depackaging is its contribution to waste reduction and reuse. Separating organic materials from their packaging makes recycling or composting much easier. This reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills and supports a circular economy.

Organic depackaging also enhances the efficiency of recycling facilities. With separated organics, these facilities can focus on processing packaging materials separately, thereby improving the overall recycling rate.

Once properly depackaged, organic materials can be transformed into valuable resources. For example, composting these materials can yield high-quality fertilizers, while converting organic waste into biogas can be used for energy production, potentially reducing dependence on fossil fuels. Some of the organic contents can also be used to feed livestock.

Methods and Challenges

Organics depackaging can be done through various methods, each with its own advantages and challenges. Mechanical separation is a common approach involving shredding, sieving, or air classification to separate organics from packaging. This method is efficient and can be applied on a large scale, although it may face limitations with complex packaging materials.

Hand depackaging is another effective method, but its usefulness is limited because it is *(continued on page 3)*

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BTI Spring Updates

Webinar

In April we hosted our first webinar, "Food Production and Sustainability." This panel discussion explored the industrial perspective of the fight against food waste. Industry experts from Innovative Waste Recycling and Cannon River Group shared their knowledge of the industry including challenges and opportunities faced by business owners. To view the recorded program visit our events page <https://www.thebrasstacks.org/events/>

Plate-to-Garden Event

On May 11, during International Compost Awareness Week, we hosted our first Plate-to-Garden event during International Compost Awareness Week! The event helped us promote a circular food system and raise funds for future programs. This event would not have been possible without the support of our partners: First Bank and Trust, Innovative Waste Recycling, Minnesota Composting Council, SMSC Organics Recycling Facility

Meet Meredith

Meredith Meyer joined our team this spring as our new education and outreach volunteer! Meredith is a recent New Prague High School graduate and will be helping us this summer before going to Auburn University in the Fall. She will be working on articles for our newsletter as well as helping with events.



Volunteers for the BTI Plate-to-Garden Event on May 11, 2024. Volunteers sold compost, facilitated a kids craft, and talked with visitors about food waste.



Volunteer, Meredith Meyer, shows off the University of Auburn planter she decorated during the Plate-to-Garden Event



JOIN US

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

Depackaging

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labor intensive and there are safety concerns for the individuals handling the materials.

Certified compostable packaging is an often-overlooked approach that eliminates the need for full depackaging. These packaging materials naturally break down under the right conditions, allowing the organics to be composted without additional processing. Widespread adoption is necessary for this approach to be effective, but the costs and consumer acceptance could be prohibitive.

One significant challenge of organic depackaging is contaminating organic waste with non-organic materials. This makes the separation process more difficult and time-consuming and can lead to costly repairs and equipment downtime. Large processing facilities must train their workforce to look for these contaminants to avoid equipment damage and rejected loads.

Opportunities and Conclusion

The future of organic depackaging is promising and filled with opportunities for innovation and progress. Extensive research and development efforts are dedicated to enhancing depackaging technologies, boosting efficiency, and expanding their ability to handle a wider variety of packaging materials at faster rates. Exciting advancements in sensors and artificial intelligence are poised to significantly improve the identification and separation of organics from packaging, resulting in increased accuracy, reduced contamination, and faster processing speeds.

The potential for collaboration and partnerships among waste management companies, recyclers, and packaging manufacturers adds another layer of opportunity. Together, these stakeholders can develop standardized packaging designs that are easily depackaged, ultimately facilitating more efficient recycling and composting processes.

In essence, organic depackaging is crucial in promoting waste management and environmental sustainability, offering many benefits such as waste reduction, improved

recycling efficiency, and the generation of valuable resources. Despite the challenges ahead, technological advancements and growing awareness have the potential to fuel the expansion of organic depackaging, paving the way for a cleaner and more sustainable future.

Todd Fischer is a project director for Innovative Waste Recycling. Innovative Waste Recycling provides full-service organics management, sustainability, and recycling solutions for the food production industry. www.iwrecycling.com Connect with him on LinkedIn as well at @ToddFischer

An expanded version of this article will be available soon on Innovative Waste Recycling's LinkedIn page.



Scott Equipment Turbo Separator machine used in the depackaging process. (Courtesy Innovative Waste Recycling).

Make a Contribution and help us continue to support a sustainable food stream!!

Your contribution of any size helps us provide free and low-cost programs to families, small businesses, and other organizations.

Scan the code or visit www.thebrasstacks.org to make a donation today!



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.



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