SCAC Awards Application

August 7, 2026

This applicaton is for:	J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award
Project Title	From Waste to Resource: Beaufort County's Residential Food Waste Diversion Program
County or Counties	Beaufort County
Application Contact	Victoria Hoffman, Solid Waste & Recycling Program Manager
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Project Written Submission

Project Summary

Beaufort County recognized an opportunity to address one of the largest remaining components of the municipal solid waste stream—food waste. Rather than waiting for regulations or rising disposal costs to force action, Beaufort County developed one of South Carolina's first county-operated residential food waste diversion programs that utilizes an in-vessel composting system. While food waste diversion and composting initiatives exist throughout the state, Beaufort County has created a unique model by combining resident collection, education, data tracking, and in-house compost processing into a single county-operated system.

Supported through funding from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SC DES), and a $68,400 County match, Beaufort County created more than a composting facility. The County designed a complete residential food waste diversion system that integrates convenient collection sites, participant training, contamination prevention, operational data tracking, and public education into a practical, scalable program.

In just six months, the program diverted over 30,000 pounds of food waste collected through the County's Convenience Centers and local small businesses. The in-vessel composting system now produces approximately two tons of finished compost every two weeks, transforming materials once destined for the landfill into a valuable community resource while reducing disposal costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

Recognizing that long-term success depends on public participation, Beaufort County paired innovative operations with an equally innovative education campaign. Through the creation of Mossy, a compost mascot inspired by the Gullah Geechee culture, the County uses animation, school outreach, television programming, social media, and community events to inspire residents of all ages to rethink food waste and embrace composting.

Today, Beaufort County's Residential Food Waste Diversion Program demonstrates what local government can accomplish through innovation, collaboration, and community engagement. More than a composting program, it is a scalable model for waste diversion that other communities can adapt to reduce dependence on landfills, improve environmental stewardship, and create long-term value for taxpayers.

Project Effort/Difficulty

Developing Beaufort County's Residential Food Waste Diversion Program required far more than purchasing composting equipment. It required designing, permitting, constructing, implementing, and operating an entirely new public service that had never existed within our area.

The project began with securing $273,600 in competitive funding through the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), $79,500 in grant funding from the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SC DES), and a $68,400 County match. While obtaining funding was a significant milestone, it marked only the beginning of a complex, multi-year implementation effort. Additional capital funding allowed the County to prepare the site, construct the necessary infrastructure, and procure specialized composting equipment.

One of the project's greatest challenges occurred when the original processing partner unexpectedly withdrew. Rather than abandoning the project, County staff evaluated alternative technologies, selected a new processing method, and developed an entirely in-house operating model. In doing so, staff became experts in compost science, permitting, logistics, equipment operation, contamination prevention, and daily program management.

Finding a suitable composting location presented another significant obstacle. Multiple potential sites were evaluated before staff identified the Beaufort County Public Works Complex as a suitable location. County staff navigated state permitting requirements, environmental reviews, and site development while obtaining approval to operate under a conditional exemption.

Implementation required extensive coordination across numerous County divisions and external partners. Staff managed procurement, developed operational procedures, prepared the site, coordinated utility installation, installed equipment, created participant registration and training materials, established data tracking methods, and launched a comprehensive public education campaign—all while maintaining the County's existing solid waste operations without adding dedicated staff positions.

This initiative also represents Beaufort County's first major waste diversion program introduced in more than two decades. Unlike previous recycling initiatives driven by state legislation, this program was developed voluntarily because County leadership recognized an opportunity to address an emerging challenge before it became a larger problem.

County employees continue to collect materials, operate the in-vessel composting system, monitor the composting process, screen finished compost, track performance metrics, and educate the public—demonstrating an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and operational excellence.

As with any new public initiative, introducing a residential food waste diversion program generated questions from residents regarding odors, insects, and proper material preparation. Beaufort County proactively addressed these concerns by requiring participant training before enrollment, implementing contamination prevention measures, routinely monitoring collection sites, and providing clear educational materials outlining accepted materials and best management practices. The overwhelmingly positive response demonstrates that thoughtful planning, education, and communication can successfully build public confidence and participation.

Implementation also occurred during a period of procurement delays, changing material costs, and fiscal-year budget transitions. County staff continuously evaluated expenditures, adjusted implementation schedules when necessary, and pursued additional funding opportunities to keep the project moving forward without compromising its long-term vision.

The program's success reflects collaboration among federal, state, private, and community partners, each contributing unique expertise and resources. The USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture provided the primary grant funding, while the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services offered financial assistance, technical guidance, permitting support, and ongoing collaboration to ensure the program aligned with statewide waste diversion goals. HDR helped develop the program toolkit and community outreach strategy, strengthening implementation and long-term sustainability. Local creative professionals—including Moondog Animation Studios, Queen Quet, Quentin Baxter, and Joy Vandervort-

Cobb—helped create a culturally authentic education campaign centered around Mossy. Community partnerships continue to expand through participation from schools, local businesses, residents, agricultural partners, and community organizations, transforming the program into a countywide initiative that combines environmental stewardship, public education, cultural appreciation, and community engagement.

While the Residential Food Waste Diversion Program has already demonstrated measurable success, County leadership views it as the foundation for a much larger initiative. The next phase focuses on expanding food waste collection into Beaufort County School District cafeterias, strengthening partnerships with local businesses through a Green Business recognition program, and developing a regional hub-and-spoke model for organics management. As processing capacity grows, Beaufort County intends to share its experience and operational knowledge with neighboring communities interested in developing similar programs.

The County views this investment as one that will continue generating long-term value by reducing hauling and landfill disposal costs while producing a beneficial end product that can be returned to the community. The vision extends beyond composting—it is about creating a resilient, scalable waste diversion system that supports environmental stewardship, promotes fiscal responsibility, and demonstrates how local governments can work together to address one of South Carolina's most significant waste management challenges.

Benefit/Importance of Project

Every day, Beaufort County residents place their trash at the curb or bring it to one of the County's nine Convenience Centers with little thought about where it ultimately goes. Yet managing solid waste is one of the most essential public services provided by local government. As Beaufort County continues to experience rapid population growth, so too, does the volume—and cost—of managing waste generated by residents, visitors, and businesses.

Food waste represents one of the greatest remaining opportunities to reduce landfill disposal. A recent study conducted by the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SC DES) found that more than 30 percent of the municipal solid waste stream consists of compostable organic materials. When these materials are buried in a landfill, taxpayers pay twice—once to transport the waste and again to dispose of it. Recognizing both the environmental and financial cost of food waste, Beaufort County saw an opportunity to reduce waste before it became a larger burden on taxpayers. Landfilled organics also generate methane, a potent greenhouse gas, while consuming valuable landfill capacity.

Residents had long expressed interest in composting through CitizenGram requests, emails, phone calls, public meetings, and social media. Rather than waiting for regulations or rising disposal costs to force action, Beaufort County developed a local solution. The Residential Food Waste Diversion Program provides residents with a convenient and accessible way to divert food waste while supporting the County's Strategic Plan, Solid Waste Management Plan, and the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services' waste reduction initiatives.

Beyond its environmental benefits, the program represents responsible fiscal management. Every pound of food waste diverted reduces future hauling and landfill disposal costs. Based on current disposal costs, full residential participation could save Beaufort County more than $1 million annually in avoided landfill disposal costs, excluding reduced transportation expenses. As participation continues to grow, the County anticipates significant long-term savings through avoided disposal expenses while creating opportunities for future revenue through compost production and expanded organics management services.

As one of South Carolina's fastest-growing counties, Beaufort County faces increasing demands on its infrastructure, transportation network, and solid waste system. The composting program addresses several community priorities simultaneously by reducing landfill disposal, extending landfill capacity, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, and decreasing the number of waste-hauling trips. Fewer trips mean reduced fuel consumption, lower vehicle emissions, and less wear on public roadways.

The benefits extend well beyond waste diversion. Finished compost improves soil health, increases water

retention, reduces erosion, and decreases reliance on commercial fertilizers. These improvements strengthen stormwater management, support healthier landscapes, and help protect Beaufort County's rivers, marshes, and coastal ecosystems that support the seafood we love to eat!

In just six months, the program has diverted over 30,000 pounds of food waste collected through the County's Convenience Centers and small local businesses. The in-vessel composting system now produces approximately two tons of finished compost every two weeks, transforming materials once destined for the landfill into a valuable community resource.

Although more than 700 residents have enrolled in less than six months—representing approximately one percent of Beaufort County's population—the program's benefits extend far beyond registered participants. Every resident benefits when landfill disposal costs are reduced, landfill capacity is preserved, and taxpayer dollars are used more efficiently. Local businesses will have a sustainable option for managing food waste, we are preparing for schools to incorporate food waste diversion into cafeteria operations, and future generations will benefit from a more resilient and sustainable solid waste system.

The program also serves as a catalyst for environmental education. Through outreach initiatives, community events, classroom presentations, and partnerships with local organizations, Beaufort County is helping residents understand that food waste is not simply garbage—it is a valuable resource that can be transformed into compost, enriching local soils instead of occupying valuable landfill space.

The County has also emphasized that composting should never replace feeding people. Through partnerships with local food recovery organizations, businesses are encouraged to donate edible food whenever possible before diverting unavoidable food scraps for composting. This approach supports both waste reduction and food security within the community.

Ultimately, the Residential Food Waste Diversion Program demonstrates that environmental stewardship and fiscal responsibility are not competing priorities. By investing in a proactive solution today, Beaufort County is reducing long-term operating costs, protecting natural resources, and creating a scalable public service that will benefit residents for generations to come.

Project Originality/Innovation

Beaufort County did not invent composting, nor are we the first local government to divert food waste. Programs in Charleston County, South Carolina, and New Hanover County, North Carolina, provided valuable insight during planning and implementation. Rather than duplicating an existing model, Beaufort County adapted those lessons to create a residential food waste diversion system tailored to the County's unique geography, Convenience Center network, and operational needs.

To our knowledge, Beaufort County is the first local government in South Carolina to design, own, and operate an entirely in-house residential food waste diversion program utilizing an in-vessel composting system. County staff manages every aspect of the program—from collection and transportation to compost production, quality control, participant education, performance tracking, and public outreach. Maintaining complete operational ownership provides flexibility, accountability, and the ability to continuously improve the program as participation grows.

What truly distinguishes the program is that it was designed as a complete waste diversion system rather than simply a composting operation. Convenient collection locations, participant training, contamination prevention, operational data tracking, and long-term expansion planning were intentionally integrated into one cohesive program. By leveraging Beaufort County's existing network of nine Convenience Centers as collection hubs, the County created a system that met residents where they already dispose of waste, making participation convenient while avoiding the cost of building an entirely new collection network.

The County also recognized that successful composting depends as much on public participation as it does on technology. Rather than relying solely on brochures or presentations, Beaufort County developed an innovative education campaign centered around Mossy, a compost ambassador inspired by the Gullah Geechee culture and the natural beauty of the Lowcountry. Through professionally produced animation, original music, television programming, classroom presentations, social media, and community events,

Mossy transformed a technical waste management program into an engaging community initiative that encourages long-term behavioral change while celebrating the Low Country's cultural heritage.

Innovation also extended beyond implementation. From the beginning, Beaufort County documented each phase of development—including grant administration, permitting, procurement, operations, education, and outreach—to create an implementation toolkit that can help other communities establish similar programs. The County's long-term vision is to support a regional hub-and-spoke approach by sharing operational knowledge, educational resources, and lessons learned with neighboring jurisdictions interested in expanding food waste diversion.

Ultimately, Beaufort County's greatest innovation is not a single piece of equipment or educational campaign. It is the creation of a locally operated, food waste diversion model that combines technology, education, operational excellence, and community engagement into a practical system that other local governments can adapt to meet their own needs.

Concluding Remarks

Every county in South Carolina manages waste. Every county faces increasing disposal costs, growing populations, and the responsibility of protecting the natural resources that make our communities unique. The question is not whether these challenges exist—the question is how we choose to respond.

Beaufort County chose to lead.

Rather than waiting for a mandate, a funding crisis, or diminishing landfill capacity to force change, we recognized an opportunity and built a solution. What began as an idea evolved into a county-led Residential Food Waste Diversion Program that transforms discarded materials into a valuable community resource, educates residents of all ages, reduces long-term disposal costs, and strengthens environmental stewardship for generations to come.

This program was never just about compost. It was about people. It was about listening to our residents, protecting the place we call home, being responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, and having the courage to solve tomorrow's challenges today.

If one county can rethink waste, imagine what all forty-six counties can accomplish together.

We hope this project inspires communities across South Carolina to see waste not as an inevitable expense, but as an opportunity for innovation, collaboration, and lasting environmental stewardship. Because every pound diverted, every resident educated, and every community inspired brings us closer to a cleaner, stronger, and more sustainable South Carolina.

The best solutions do not end at the county line—they grow beyond it.

Beaufort County
SOUTH CAROLINA

Turn Your Scraps into Soil

Join Beaufort County's Food Waste Drop-Off Pilot Program

Food waste makes up nearly 25% of what we throw away — but it doesn't have to. You can collect your food scraps at home and drop them off at a designated site, where they'll be turned into compost right here in Beaufort County.

HOW IT WORKS

1. **Collect your food scraps**
   Use any container with a lid — an old coffee tub, a compost caddy, even a yogurt container.
2. **Take the short quiz**
   Learn the basics to prevent contamination, get your access code, and you're good to go.
3. **Drop off your scrap**
   Visit the site, enter your code, and drop them in the bin. That's it!

Take the quiz, get your code, and start composting today!

Do's, Dont's, and Reminders

WHAT TO COMPOST

- √ Fruit & veggie scraps
- √ Coffee grounds & filters
- √ Eggshells
- √ Dairy products
- √ Paper napkins/paper towels (no plastic lining)
- √ Tea bags (paper only – no staples or plastic mesh)
- √ BPI-certified compostable bags only

WHAT NOT TO COMPOST

- Raw meat or bones X
- Plastic or Wrappers X
- Produce Stickers X
- Pet Waste X
- "Compostable" bags without a BPI certification X

Contamination ruins compost. If you're unsure - leave it out!

BEFORE YOU DROP OFF

All participants must take a short quiz to receive the access code to unlock the bin.

This helps ensure everyone is composting correctly.

Did You Know?

Your food scraps will be processed locally right here in Beaufort County, using an in-vessel system.

An in-vessel system is a closed, controlled composting unit that speeds up decomposition by managing temperature, airflow, and moisture creating nutrient rich compost.

Questions?

Visit BeaufortCountySC.gov/compost
Or scan the QR code to get started.

BEAUFORT COUNTY SOUTH CAROLINA 1769

Beaufort County Composting Program
Mossy Educational Resources

BEAUFORT COUNTY FOOD SCRAP DROP-OFF

ITEMS ACCEPTED:

- Fruits
- Dairy Products (e.g.,milk,cheese,yogurt)
- Vegetables
- Coffee Grounds, Filters, and Tea Bags
- Eggs and Shells
- Bread, Dough, Bakery Items, Pasta, and Grain
- Food-Soiled Paper (e.g.,bags,papertowels, napkins, waxed cardboard boxes)
- Small Amounts of Compostable Liquids (e.g., water, juices)
- Processed Foods (e.g.,pizza,cereal, chips, crackers, cookies, cakes, plate scrapings)
- Cooked Meats, Fish, Bones, and Shells

ITEMS NOT ACCEPTED:

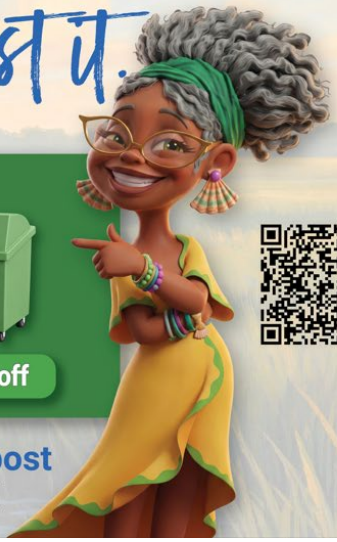
- NO Raw Meat (e.g., beef, poultry, pork, seafood)
- NO Plastic Items (e.g.,bags, dishes,cups, utensils, styrofoam) and Other Small Items (e.g.,rubberbands, twist ties)
- NO Chemical Cleaners
- NO Non-Food Items (e.g.,wood,metal, glass, ceramics,pet droppings, yard debris)
- NO Fats, Oils, Grease, or Non-Compostable Liquids (e.g., vegetable oil, lard)

DON'T WASTE FOOD SC

Visit beaufortcountysc.gov/solid-waste-and-recycle for more information.
Please report any issues or maintenance concerns to Beaufort County Solid Waste and Recycle at (843) 255-2736

FUNDED BY OR-2739 3/25 SC DEPARTMENT of ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Don't Trash it. Compost it.



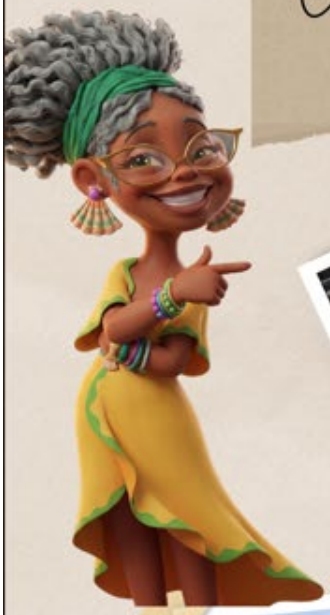
How it Works

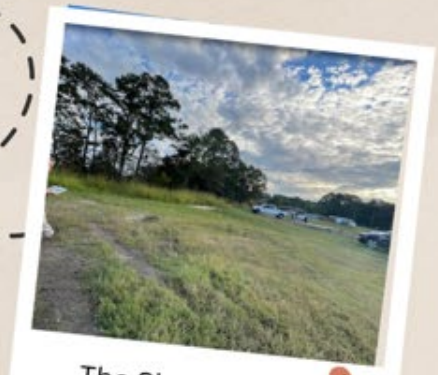
1. Take the Quizz
2. Collect
3. Drop off

Visit **BeaufortCountySC.gov/compost**
Or **scan the QR** code to get started

The journey to

Composting





The Site-Before

The Site- Now

The Earth Flow

Inside the unit

COMPOST

DON'T WASTE FOOD SC

BEAUFORT COUNTY SOUTH CAROLINA 1769

COUNTY COUNCIL OF BEAUFORT COUNTY

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
BEAUFORT COUNTY GOVERNMENT ROBERT SMALLS COMPLEX
100 RIBAUT ROAD
POST OFFICE DRAWER 1228
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August 6, 2026

Awards Committee
J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award
South Carolina Association of Counties
1919 Thurmond Mall
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Awards Committee:

I am pleased to offer my enthusiastic support for Beaufort County's submission for the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award recognizing our Pilot Composting Program.

The Beaufort County Council has proudly supported this initiative from its inception, recognizing both the environmental and operational benefits of creating a sustainable solution for organic waste management. Through careful planning, strategic investment, and the dedication of County staff, Beaufort County has implemented the first government-operated in-vessel composting program of its kind in South Carolina. This innovative program diverts residential food waste from landfills, reduces methane-producing organic waste, and transforms discarded materials into a valuable community resource.

The Pilot Composting Program demonstrates the County's commitment to innovation, stewardship of public resources, and environmental sustainability. In only its first few months of operation, the program enrolled more than 670 residents and diverted over 30,000 pounds of food waste from the landfill. Beyond these impressive early results, the program establishes a foundation for expanded partnerships with schools, businesses, homeowners' associations, and community organizations while promoting public education and long-term waste reduction.

This initiative exemplifies the forward-thinking leadership and creative problem-solving that the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award was established to recognize. Beaufort County identified an emerging challenge, developed an innovative local solution, and created a program with measurable benefits that can serve as a model for counties throughout South Carolina.

Thank you for your consideration of Beaufort County's Pilot Composting Program for this prestigious award.

Sincerely,

Alice G. Howard

Alice G. Howard, Chair
Beaufort County Council