

Master Recycler/Composter 2021 Report

Our Mission

To bridge the gap between awareness and action by motivating people to reduce waste in their homes and workplaces.

Highlights

Number of classes - 2

Locations

Spring— Lebanon Hills Visitor Center, Eagan

Fall—Dakota County Western Service Center, Apple Valley

2021 Participants - 39

Spring—16

Fall—23 with a MN GreenCorps member

Overall Participants - 373

Volunteer hours – 554.5

Program background

The Master Recycler/Composter (MRC) program provides training on waste reduction, recycling, composting and solid waste. The program extends over a 6-week period, with one 2.5-hour class each week. Participants receive a training handbook, engage in hands-on demonstrations, hear presentations from local and regional experts, and go on a half-day field trip to relevant sites. The program offers two trainings per year in the spring and fall, rotating locations throughout Dakota County.

Graduates agree to volunteer 30 hours putting their skills to work to help others learn how to reduce waste. Volunteers have staffed informational booths, made presentations, and have worked on special projects in their neighborhoods, schools and workplaces. MRC graduates share their time, knowledge, and skills to build positive change and help reduce waste in Dakota County.

COVID-19 Effect

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect this and all programs. The fall and spring courses were held in-person with capacity limits, social distancing, and mask requirements.

Master Recyclers rely on many events and programs throughout the year to complete their volunteer hours. Many events were postponed or were changed in a way that did not need MRCs. To fill some of this void and to help fellow county residents, we continued to allow volunteering at food shelves and thrift stores to count towards hours. These places rely on volunteers and keep donated food and materials out of the trash.

Presentations and Field Trips

The course would not be as successful without the support of regional experts. Field trips provide participants a first-hand experience to learn more about waste management. One field trip was offered in the fall to current and past MRCs classes.

Dakota County

Renee Burman
Jon Buck
John Exner
Jenny Kedward
Kristi Otterson

Dakota Valley Recycling, Jackson Becker

The Mulch Store, Jake Duame

The Open Door Food Pantry, Adam Hoffman

ReUSE Minnesota, Emily Barker

Master Recycler/Composter, Tim Smit

Communications

The best way to reach all Master Recycler/Composters is through e-mail. Monthly e-mails (see appendix) give updates, remind participants to report hours, and list volunteer opportunities. A new format using the county's listserv management system started to be used in May, which gives analytics each month.

A webpage on the Dakota County website intended for current MRCs lists volunteer opportunities, how to report hours, and general resources.

Master Recycler/Composters use the Facebook group regularly (189 members). Only people invited or approved can be in the private group. In 2020, 181 items were posted with 1,196 reactions, and 565 comments on posts.

Continuing education

Past MRCs have expressed interested in continuing their education. All refresher events were recorded and shared with MRCs who couldn't attend.

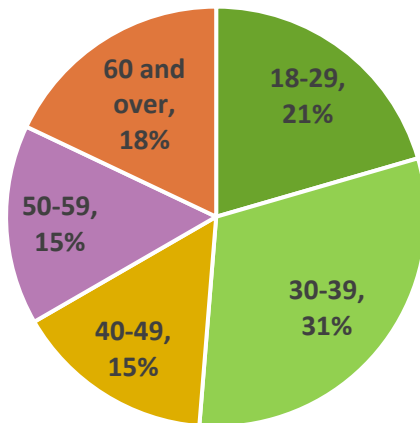
- Aug. 5 – Recycling Refresher (online)

Participants

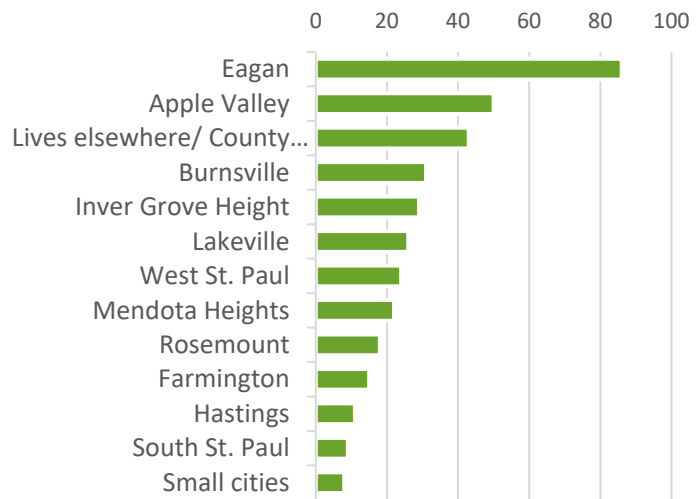
The participants in the MRC program range in age, background and where they live in Dakota County. The following graphs highlight what we know about Master Recycler/Composters.



2021 MRC Participant Age Range



Geographic Distribution of All MRCs



Knowledge

One of the main purposes of the Master Recycler/Composter program. Participants fill out a pre- and post-class test to see if they gained basic recycling knowledge.

- ▶ The spring class answered 81% of the answers correctly after the course compared to 71% before.
- ▶ The fall class participants increased their knowledge to answer 81% of questions correctly after the course (73% before)

Recycling certain paper and plastic items are the most challenging for residents to understand based on anecdotal outreach by Dakota County staff and statistically significant surveys of residents. Two questions in the pre- and post-class test focused on these items. Participants were asked to choose items in two categories that would go in a home recycling cart.

Volunteering

A key component of the Master Recycler/Composter program is volunteering. By having educated residents at events and helping to coordinate recycling projects, county and city staff are supported and able to expand programs and run events more smoothly.

MRCs had a 2% decrease in the amount of payback hours reported over the previous year. Many MRCs often forget to log their hours, so they are missing from these totals. Also, often MRCs stop reporting after they complete their 30 hours even though they continue to volunteer.

Year	Total Hours	Hourly Cost Value*	Direct Contact with residents
2021	554.5	\$15,082	2,969
2020	514.08	\$13,983	7,729
2019	1244.26	\$33,843	12,345
2018	1087.18	\$29,571	10,290
2017	716.75	\$19,496	7,812
2016	769.00	\$20,917	11,134
2015	637.50	\$17,340	10,451
2014	502.75	\$14,164	10,229
Total	3,583.18	\$163,850	71,906

*Hour valued at \$27.20

New Certified Master Recycler/Composters

Six (6) Master Recycler/Composters completed their obligatory 30 hours of volunteering. One in five of all graduates have completed their payback hours (75 total). Overall, half (47%) of MRCs have reported some hours.

Thank you to the following Master Recycler/Composters who gave 30 or more hours of their time to make our world better in 2021.

- **Marcia Christopherson (more than 100 hours)**
- Sharron Conner
- Rita Considine
- **Paul Hirsch (over 50 hours)**
- **Kristin Howe (more than 50 hours)**
- Don Matthys
- **Karla McKenzie (more than 100 hours)**
- Rae Ann Prasnicki
- **Angie Schlede (more than 50 hours)**
- **Ethan Skinner (more than 50 hours)**
- Caleb Werth

Highlights

Fix-It Clinics went back to in-person events. Master Recyclers gave 60.5 hours of volunteering at these monthly gatherings starting in August.

Food recover is important to waste reduction. Master Recyclers spent 127.5 hours working at organizations that handle donated food, including The Open Door Food Pantry and 360 Communities.

Evaluation

Each class is sent an online evaluation to gather feedback and test their knowledge. MRCs gave their opinions on the overall class structure, handouts, presentations, and field trips. Below are key questions pulled from the survey; the complete evaluation can be found in the appendix.

As a result from the MRC class, I understand*:	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
How to influence recycling behavior of others	92%	8%	0%
Waste management in the county	100%	0%	0%
How to reduce waste	100%	0%	0%
What to do with HHW	100%	0%	0%
How to instruct others to recycle	100%	0%	0%
What plastics are and are not recyclable	77%	23%	0%
Where I can check out education materials	92%	8%	0%
How to increase recycling in the a workplace	92%	8%	0%
How to coordinate event recycling	85%	15%	0%
How to compost at home	92%	8%	0%

Question: What did you find was the most valuable part of this course?

(Full list of feedback in appendix)

- In a more general sense, I felt very hopeful about the future because of all the work that Dakota County, and Minnesota, and other neighbor counties/states are doing...
- Various speakers was valuable to get multiple perspectives and expertise.
- I really enjoyed the field trip and witnessing firsthand how trash and recycling are processed.
- The videos and the field trip really helped explain things. It's one thing to say "no plastic bags in recycling," and clearly another to see the damage they do.

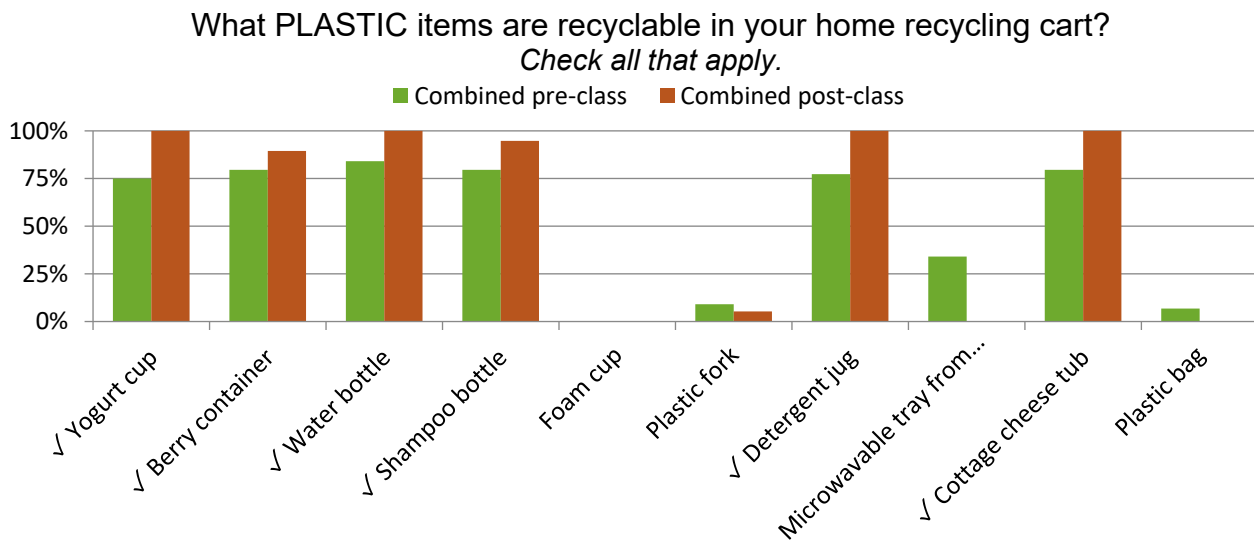
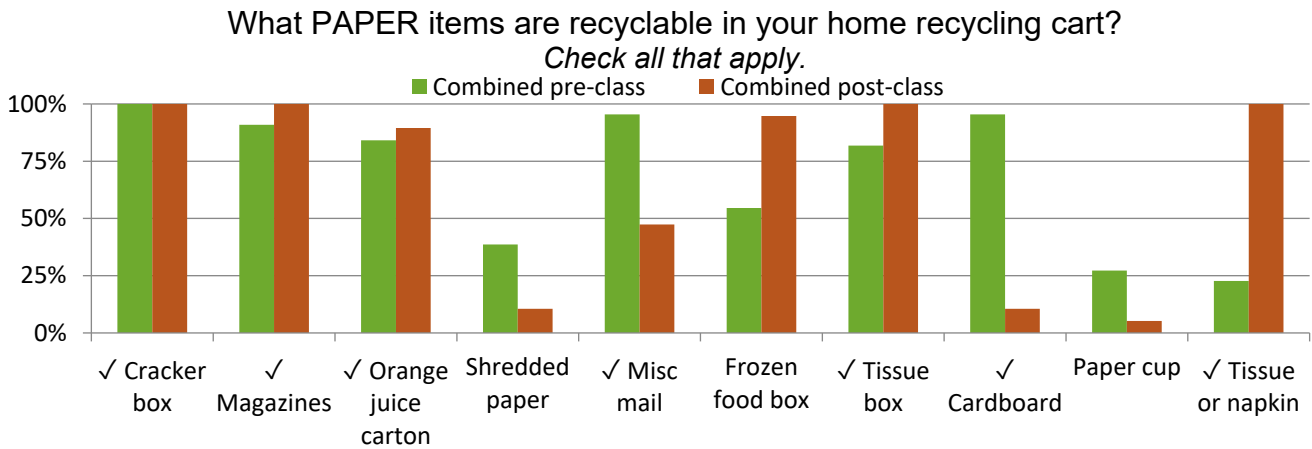
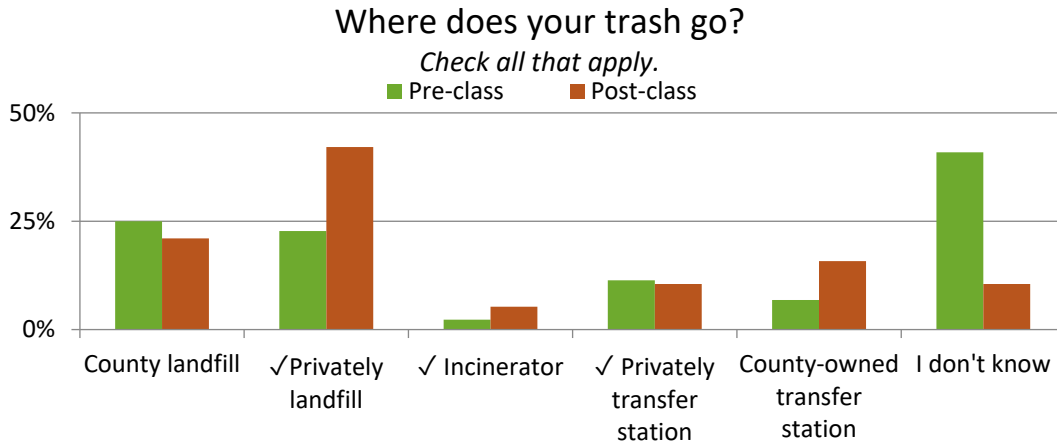
Appendix

2021 E-mails to Master Recycler/Composters

Send Date	Main Topics	Sent to	Unique Views	% engaged	Click Thrus
Feb 1	Battery recycling issues MPCA landfill applications Grants - Food waste Last call for 2020 hours	242	117	48%	65 clicks
Apr 6	Earth Day ideas Event/program updates Target car seats Paper shredding events Boat wrap collection 2020 MRC report	241	145	60%	32 clicks
Apr 27	Plant pots recycling issues Eureka virtual tour New organics drop sites	234	131	56%	66 clicks
May 25	New campaign: No bags Special mattress pickup Landfill update Eagan park issue	260	151	58%	72 clicks
Jun 29	Farmington organics site Multifamily outreach	274	154	56%	121 clicks
Sep 14	Online resource checkout Target car seat trade-in Fall cleanups Fall MRC class	274	150	55%	15 clicks

Knowledge Assessment

Pre- and post-class test. Labels with a check mark the correct answers.



How was the registration and payment process?	Spring	Fall	Overall rating
Very easy	6	5	85%
Somewhat easy	0	2	15%
Very complicated	0	0	0%
How clear were the objectives of the program/course?	Spring	Fall	Overall rating
Extremely clear	4	5	69%
Moderately clear	1	2	23%
Not at all clear	1	0	0%

Please let us know if we could have done something better related to COVID-19 and your personal safety. (Fall Class Only)

- I felt really safe gathering with the group each week, so thanks for having the rules about mask-wearing and helping us all keep socially-distanced!
- COVID-19 precautions were well done.
- masks, and social distancing observed-I felt comfortable and safe.
- I would've liked the option for virtual classes, for those who may not have felt fully comfortable being in-person.
- I felt comfortable and safe in the classroom and on the field trip.
- The choice to participate fully virtually- since there were no included field trips and everything was based on powerpoint presentations, I didn't necessarily feel there was value in physically being in the in-person space.

As a result from the MRC class, I understand:	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
How to influence recycling behavior of others	92%	8%	0%
Waste management in the county	100%	0%	0%
How to reduce waste	100%	0%	0%
What to do with HHW	100%	0%	0%
How to instruct others to recycle	100%	0%	0%
What plastics are and are not recyclable	77%	23%	0%
Where I can check out education materials	92%	8%	0%
How to increase recycling in the a workplace	92%	8%	0%
How to coordinate event recycling	85%	15%	0%
How to compost at home	92%	8%	0%

What did you find was the most valuable part of this course?

Spring Class

- In a more specific sense, I appreciated hearing about the variety of resources that the county provides and how to get connected to all of them - for myself and for sharing with others. In a more general sense, I felt very hopeful about the future because of all the work that Dakota County, and Minnesota, and other neighbor counties/states are doing; knowing that our county and state are doing these things makes me think that this is only the beginning...and more good things are coming in the world of refusing/reducing/reusing/recycling/rotting!
- Jennifer was wonderful - I appreciated her level of understanding and knowledge and how she presented her information to the class - you can't help but respect her. I am thankful also for all the speakers that came in and shared their knowledge with us. A well run program!

- Learning more about the recycling centers and the dos and don'ts. Learning how important it is to reduce waste in general.
- To me, the single most impactful thing was the video 'Just Eat It, A Food Waste Story'. The speakers, who were the experts in their fields were excellent, too. I am REALLY looking forward to the field trips.
- Various speakers was valuable to get multiple perspectives and expertise.
- What doesn't get recycled

Fall

- The best thing was the trash tour-really brought home the Environmental need for recycling & composting. The handbook was great, I now refer to it. The U-Tube videos. All of Jennifer's lectures. I am very appreciative of the opportunity to participate.
- I really enjoyed the field trip and witnessing firsthand how trash and recycling are processed.
- The guest speakers, because they had a very deep knowledge in their subject area.
- The videos and the field trip really helped explain things. It's one thing to say "no plastic bags in recycling," and clearly another to see the damage they do.
- Discussion about plastics and which are recyclable
- Psychology of change- I wish there was more of this included in other days &/or the last day was entirely about it.
- For me, the most valuable part of the course was understanding the waste pyramid and what makes something recyclable. I also enjoyed learning about waste hauling (had no idea of the different type of hauling).

Do you have any suggestions on how we could improve the course?

- I felt like things were well thought out and very helpful.
- Keep up the good work! We need to spread the word!! Hopefully, as Covid rules relax, you will be able to increase class size. I have been recommending this class to everyone.
- The course went very fast which was at some times difficult to keep up with. Overall it went well and was well-delivered. Level of communication via email was helpful.
- More time allotted for discussion. Even if it means adding an extra week. Felt rushed.
- Coffee and cookies?
- It would be great if students could complete their volunteer hours in other counties, as many may not live/work in the same county. I live in Dakota County, but work in Hennepin County, and was hoping to do my hours at my workplace, since they're trying to increase recycling efforts. My partner runs a business that I help with on the weekends, so between my full-time job and the business, I don't have much free time and don't spend much time in Dakota County.
- I can't speak for anyone else but I personally felt that I would have preferred a starting even 15 minutes earlier or a class that ran another week as opposed to rushing through material. I think people are willing to stay a little longer etc. to have their questions answered, but it just felt a bit rushed. Otherwise, fantastic! I already knew some, but really learned a lot.
- I thought it was great.
- More workshop-based/hands-on learning rather than all presentations. It might inspire us for our volunteer hours if some of our learning was shared in the same manner we'd hope to share our information to the public- it might give us more project ideas.
- My suggestion is hard to work around in the time of COVID and given the amount of material to cover, but it would be nice if we could have at least a ten minute break halfway through the class. I know we could get up to leave, but it felt awkward doing that with speakers. Maybe do questions during 10 min break in between speakers to give people a chance to use the restroom or get water or snack but also ask more specific questions? In the beginning, it felt like a lot of time to not get up and stretch, but I think I got used to it after a few of the classes.

From the reading materials, do you feel you understand the topic	No	Yes, but more would be helpful	Yes
Overall	0%	15%	85%
Introduction	0%	0%	100%
Ch. 1: Solid Waste History/Policies	0%	8%	92%
Ch. 2: Waste Reduction	0%	9%	91%
Ch. 3: Residential Recycling	0%	14%	86%
Ch. 4: Food waste prevention	0%	8%	92%
Ch. 5: Organic Recycling	8%	8%	85%
Ch. 6: Backyard Composting	18%	0%	82%
Ch. 7: Household Hazardous Waste	7%	13%	80%
Ch. 8: Business Recycling	8%	15%	77%
Ch. 9: Event & Public Space Recycling	0%	23%	77%
Ch. 10: School Recycling	0%	15%	85%
Ch. 11: Multifamily Recycling	0%	15%	85%
Ch. 12: Public Engagement	0%	15%	85%

Is there a topic area that you wished was covered more in the handbook but wasn't?

- How can we improve our dependency of plastic when a lot that is produced is not cost effective to recycle?
- What to do with clothing.
- I thought the handbook was well done. I especially appreciate the local references and how it applies to where we live.
- Low waste living but maybe that could be a different class.
- The handbook was pretty thorough. Since I in the process of organizing my building to compost, maybe more about how to persuade more residents to get on board. I know it is a process, I want them to care as much as I do.
- I don't think so. Maybe reuse?
- I can't think of any. Course and handbook were thorough.
- No, I think the topics were very adequately covered. Nice depth of material.

Would you like to have received different material?	Spring	Fall	Total Rate
Yes	6	7	100%
No	0	0	0%

If yes, what:

- More general and specific information overall. Brochures from Recycling Zone, recycling companies, maybe employment opportunities.
- Flyers and information I can pass on to residents in a multifamily unit.
- Fall
- I actually would have preferred to have just seen where the handouts or brochures are available online. I don't like keeping papers and like electronic versions, although I know that's personal preference. I'm happy I had the option for the reading to be electronic and not printed.

How satisfied were you with these presentations?	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Someone dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
Welcome	91%	9%	0%	0%
History of Waste	83%	17%	0%	0%
Hauling Systems	92%	8%	0%	0%
Waste Prevention and Reuse	85%	15%	0%	0%
Hazardous Waste	92%	8%	0%	0%
How to Get Rid of It	77%	23%	0%	0%
Recycling: Curb to Market	85%	15%	0%	0%
Recycling requirements	85%	15%	0%	0%
Recycling at home	84.6%	15.4%	0%	0%
Food Recovery	85.7%	0.0%	0%	14%
County Organics Programs	83.3%	16.7%	0%	0%
Business Recycling	83%	17%	0%	0%
Preventing Wasted Food	80%	20%	0%	0%
Composting at Home	82%	18%	0%	0%
Organics Processing	83%	8%	0%	6%
Event recycling	83%	17%	0%	0%
Recycling Best Practices	86%	14%	0%	0%
Behavior Change	69%	31%	0%	0%
Payback and outreach	82%	18%	0%	0%

If you were not satisfied with one or more of the presenters, which one(s) and why?

Spring

- I thought everyone did a great job. I think sometimes the number of questions that came from the group inadvertently bogged down some presenters, unfortunately...but they always tried to answer ppl's questions and keep things moving. It was a tough balance, but they made it happen!
- The presentation on social behavior change was informative but it was really long. It seemed like some of that material had been covered/integrated into previous presentations/conversations. Perhaps the material can be shortened, and we can spend more time on Payback and Public Outreach.

Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns about the presenters or their presentations?

- All of the presenters did a great job!
- I'd suggest increasing Kristi's presentations/time and combining the Organics presentations. It seemed like all 3 presenters kind of talked about the same things. Also, for questions, I'd instruct students to: 1) write down their questions to be asked at the end of the presentation; 2) give a number of questions based on time (e.g. We have time for 3 questions) or; 3) give each student a limit of 1-2 questions per presentation/class, so there are more questions (and less comments) and other students get a chance to ask questions versus the same students. If we run out of time for questions, students can stay after class to ask any other questions. I would have preferred this rather than students continue to interrupt the presentation then presenters have to rush through or couldn't finish their material.
- Some felt especially rushed and we nearly always left after 8:30. I think planning for more time would have been better, to help give us time to ask all the questions we have (because we always had a lot)!
- I really enjoyed the class. It is a lot of information and I know some material had to be cut out. The presenters are the most impactful, with the homework videos next and the additional reading last. Still amazed by the amount of content we went through and surprised there is more we could talk about. Curious if another session would ever be considered (for more learning or questions).

How satisfied were you with homework videos?	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Someone dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied	N/A
What is a landfill?	92%	0%	0%	0%	8%
Voyage of the Marlboro	85%	8%	0%	0%	8%
America's Dopamine-Fueled Shopping Addiction	92%	0%	0%	0%	8%
Common Mistakes Create Fires at MRFs	85%	0%	0%	0%	15%
How does a material recovery facility (MRF) work?	92%	8%	0%	0%	0%
Dem-Con Recycling	92%	8%	0%	0%	0%
(optional): Plastic Wars by PBS Frontline	62%	0%	0%	0%	38%
Just Eat It - A Food Waste Story	85%	0%	0%	0%	15%
Save the Food Presentation	57%	14%	0%	0%	29%
Behind the Scenes - Commercial Composting	77%	15%	0%	0%	8%

Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns about homework activities?

- I know there is always a time constraint, but it would have been nice to have some discussion time about some of these films
- For the most part they were helpful. We collected 2.5 ponds of Junk mail in one month.
- It seemed like the homework reading from the emails didn't match the agenda sheet that we were given at the first class. I followed the emails, but that excluded chapters 4, 8, 10, and 11 (I still read them). Also, some of the chapter labels (at the bottom of the handbook by the page numbers) didn't match the actual chapter. I think the handbook says there's a chapter 13.
- I didn't find time to do all the homework videos during the program but am hoping to go back and watch more of them when I find the time to do so.
- I really liked Just Eat It!