



NYPIRG NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:

Megan Ahearn, mahearn@nypirg.org

Blair Horner, bhorner@nypirg.org

NYPIRG's Earth Day Countdown of Ten Steps New York Must Take to be an Environmental Leader Step 8: Reduce Food Waste

(NY) – From now until Earth Day, NYPIRG is counting down ten steps that New York must take to be a national environmental leader. With climate deniers firmly in control of national policies, it will be up to the states to act. In recent years, New York has unveiled ambitious environmental programs and actions. But, announcements must be backed up by achievements.

Step 8 is for Governor Cuomo to continue working to reduce and reuse food waste in New York State and advance the Food Recovery and Recycling Act.

The Governor has sought to take action on food waste over the last two years, but opposition has blocked its inclusion in the state budget or its approval by the State legislature. As the legislation continues to be debated, the Governor should direct the state's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to explore administrative steps to assist with food waste, including increased economic development grants for composting and food waste operations, and expanded education efforts.

Earlier this year, the Governor awarded \$3.5 million in grant money to increase food donations and boost municipal organics recycling programs in a few counties in the state. Actions like these are good interim steps, however a statewide solution is needed to truly realize the environmental and food security benefits possible.

Food waste is a significant societal problem that not only negatively impacts the environment, but also affects millions of Americans facing food insecurity and hunger. In New York alone, some 2.5 million residents do not get enough to eat. In the United States, 40 percent of the food processed is never eaten. This waste, which is created at every stage of the journey from farm to fork, results in millions of pounds of food rotting in landfills and releasing methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.

If approved, when phased in over three years, the *Food Recovery and Recycling Act* would respond to these related problems by requiring all food generators covered under the law to either donate edible food or send excess food for animal feed or for composting.¹ New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) estimates that if food scraps were recycled or diverted to compost, large food waste generators could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 175,488 metric tons annually, the equivalent of taking 37,093 cars off the road.² And, if just 15 percent of the food wasted each year was captured, the nation would be able to feed about 25 million Americans every year.³

NYSERDA estimates that the cost of disposing of food waste and from greenhouse gases is approximately \$41 million annually. If the use of food waste recycling facilities is expanded throughout the state, it could reduce those costs by up to \$22 million a year.⁴ The Governor has rightly highlighted the shame that food waste is, both for our food insecure and hungry neighbors and for the environment. Now, New York needs his leadership to bring the *Food Recovery and Recycling Act* across the finish line.

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¹ 2019 Executive Budget proposal page 301. Accessed at www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy19/exec/fy19artVII/TEDArticleVII.pdf.

² NYSERDA Report see: <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/About/Newsroom/2017-Announcements/2017-03-16-NYSERDA-Diverting-Food-Scraps-From-Landfills-Produce-Net-Benefit-22M-Annually>.

³ *Wasted: How America is Losing up to 40 Percent of its Food from Farm to Fork To Landfill*, Natural Resources Defense Council, August 2012, p.

1. Accessed at www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/wasted-food-IP.pdf.

⁴ *Supra* 2.