

## St. John's University Achieves Gold Rating with the AASHE-STARS Program

An important strategy for meeting sustainability goals and demonstrating the “full-cycle / recycle” ethic has become food waste collection and composting on university campuses. An on-campus compost system offers the perfect opportunity to integrate the philosophy and application of sustainability in a pure and immediately rewarding context. The financial incentive is significant, with a return on investment of 1-year or less. Best of all, it offers students an opportunity to gain valuable hands-on experience.

O<sub>2</sub>Compost works with colleges and universities throughout the United States to develop on-campus composting systems to process food waste, landscaping waste and livestock manure. Example systems include:

- St. John's University (photo - right)
- University of Rhode Island
- Skidmore College
- Syracuse University
- Virginia Tech
- SUNY Cobleskill



In all cases, O<sub>2</sub>Compost uses the aerated static pile method of composting as a simple way to: optimize the biology of the compost process; mitigate adverse impacts to ground water, surface water and air quality; expedite the composting process; and produce a high-quality finished product that is safe to use - free of pathogens, parasites and weed seeds.

St. John's University in New York City recently achieved a Gold Rating with the AASHE<sup>(1)</sup> STARS<sup>(2)</sup> Program, in part because of their efforts to: 1) collect food waste from university dining halls and coffee shops, 2) compost it on-campus, and 3) utilize their finished compost in sustainable landscape practices and in a student organic garden. By composting on-site, St. John's has reduced its carbon footprint by eliminating the need for the Department of Sanitation to transport food waste to a landfill, thereby significantly reducing both truck exhaust and the production of landfill greenhouse gases. In addition, St. John's participates in EPA's Food Recovery Challenge and the Greater Greener New York program.



The composting system is managed by Mr. Tom Goldsmith, St. John's Facility Manager. He enjoys a great deal of help and enthusiasm provided by his team of Student Sustainability Coordinators. Under Tom's watchful eye, each Sustainability Coordinator runs a specific area of the campus "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle" Program.

The students who participate in this program represent freshman through graduate students and they have majors as diverse as environmental engineering, English, political science and social justice. The compost system was built by the students using recycled / repurposed material. Many of the students had no prior construction experience.



The amazing thing about the St. John's food waste composting project is that the students are fully engaged and excited and proud to be involved with something that matters - their efforts produce tangible, positive results. Where in the past each student would have seen a "waste problem" they undoubtedly can now see a "resource opportunity".

Best of all, each student takes on a leadership role by training each new team member – the ideal expression of sustainability. They are "learning by doing" and will take this sense of responsibility with them as they pursue careers in their chosen fields.

It has been my absolute pleasure to work with Tom and his team of Student Sustainability Coordinators. Congratulations to St. John's University for achieving the STARS Gold Rating.

To a job well done,

Peter Moon, P.E.  
President / Principal Engineer

For more information about O<sub>2</sub>Compost systems, visit [www.o2compost.com](http://www.o2compost.com) and submit a Contact Us form. We will be happy to schedule time for a free 30-minute consultation.

For information about Ecological Landcare, visit [www.compostwerks.com](http://www.compostwerks.com). Compostwerks has been an integral part of St. John's University's success in achieving a Gold Rating. They provide a broad range of equipment, compost tea supplies, natural soil amendments, and consulting and educational services.



## 1) AASHE: Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education

AASHE's mission is to empower higher education to lead the sustainability transformation. This is done by providing resources, professional development, and a network of support to enable institutions of higher education to model and advance sustainability in everything they do, from governance and operations to education and research.

### AASHE's Goals

Extending its role as a thought leader for higher education sustainability\*, AASHE will:

1. Deliver services that increase its value to a growing and diverse membership and will increase its impact on sustainability in higher education;
2. Convene experts and collect, evaluate, and disseminate information and tools to increase the understanding of sustainability and its relevance to higher education stakeholders;
3. Support and enable higher education to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of global climate disruption;
4. Lead the transformation of educational practices (including the curriculum) to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet sustainability challenges;
5. Lead the assessment and reporting of metrics of sustainability in higher education for the purpose of driving improvements in sustainable practices and education through its Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS).

\*AASHE defines sustainability in an inclusive way, encompassing human and ecological health, social justice, secure livelihoods, and a better world for all generations.

## 2) STARS: Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System

STARS is an innovative, voluntary self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to gauge progress toward sustainability and be recognized for sustainability leadership.

STARS is designed to:

- Provide a guide for advancing sustainability in all sectors of higher education, from education and research to operations and administration.
- Enable meaningful comparisons over time and across institutions by establishing a common standard of measurement for sustainability in higher education.
- Create incentives for continual improvement toward sustainability.
- Facilitate information sharing about higher education sustainability practices and performance.
- Build a stronger, more diverse campus sustainability community and promote a comprehensive understanding of sustainability that includes its social, economic and environmental dimensions.

**Websites:** <http://www.aashe.org/> <https://stars.aashe.org/>