



July 28, 2026

To whom it may concern,

As Douglas and Jefferson Counties work together to develop their joint Solid Waste Management Plan, and the City of Lawrence continues developing their own Solid Waste Master Plan, the Douglas County Food Policy Council (DCFPC) recommends that organic waste be recognized as a critical part of both our waste and food systems. As a joint advisory body to the City of Lawrence and Douglas County specializing in food-systems policy, the DCFPC stands ready to assist both governments in the development of these plans and is happy to engage on whatever level is helpful. While the City of Lawrence currently operates a yard waste composting facility, no public infrastructure exists in our county for the recycling of organic waste produced by home kitchens, restaurants, institutional cafeterias, or any food production facilities. This represents a profound missed opportunity to advance several goals set forth in the [Douglas County Food System Plan](#) and [Adapt Douglas County – Climate Action and Adaptation Plan](#). We therefore ask that the City and County consider three main recommendations:

- (1) **Utilize organic waste to amplify soil health.** Recycling food and yard waste via composting can promote soil health and return nutrients to agricultural lands. Intensive agricultural practices that rely on chemical fertilizers to restore nutrient levels for production are expensive, prone to geopolitical disruptions, and unsustainable in the long run. In contrast, our community could produce our own inexpensive compost that would support area farms, community gardens, and municipal landscaping as well as result in more resilient soils and less pollution of our waterways. Promoting soil health via the establishment of county-wide composting infrastructure aligns with the following objectives from our joint City and County plans:

**Adapt Douglas County, Goal 7:** Protect and build the potential of carbon-sequestering ecosystems

**Adapt Douglas County, Goal 12:** Increase community resilience through skill-building, self-sufficiency, and resource sharing

**Food System Plan, Goal 2.3:** Improve soil and water quality

**Food System Plan, Goal 2.5:** Build the resilience of agricultural ecosystems

- (2) **Explore the potential cost-savings of organic waste diversion.** When our organic waste goes to the landfill, we lose out on its value to our soils—and we spend tax dollars doing so. Composting organic waste can reduce both waste collection and disposal costs and ultimately bolster our resilience to climate and geopolitical shifts. Hamm (now Republic/Hamm Landfill) tipping fees

were unchanged from 1993-2010 at \$19.15/ton but have since risen 3.5% annually. Recent data from the City of Lawrence's Solid Waste Master Planning waste assessment shows that nearly 40% is organic, so diversion can result in defined cost savings, extend the longevity of the landfill, and strengthen the City and County's negotiating position with the Republic/Hamm Landfill . We understand that the City and the County use different models for waste collection and that potential savings resulting from organic waste diversion will vary in each case.

- (3) Prioritize community education.** Transforming the culture of waste in our community requires that residents are aware of the benefits of healthy soils, composting, and waste diversion. We encourage the County and City to devote resources to awareness campaigns, educational programming, and actions that promote sustainable waste management. This might include the use of compostable cutlery in public facilities and at public events, which aligns with **Policy 1.5.4** of the Food System Plan ("Adopt public procurement policies that guide waste reduction"). As contamination of our waste stream remains a costly issue for the City in particular, community education can support both improved soil health via diversion and municipal cost savings.

We recommend that the City and County support local composting programs and/or facilities to take advantage of these diverse benefits, aligning with Adapt Douglas County – Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (G13-S1). With a robust program, we can recycle organic nutrients to improve soil health, reallocate spending from rising landfill fees and contamination penalties to municipally controlled local composting, and insulate our community from global and geopolitical shocks associated with both waste management and nutrients. All these allow us to use waste resources to grow healthy, local food.

Thank you for your work on these plans.

Sincerely,

  
Ben Sikes (Jul 31, 2026 15:05:06 CDT)  
Ben Sikes, Co-Chair  
Douglas County Food Policy Council

  
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Final Audit Report

2026-07-31

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|-----------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Created:        | 2026-07-31 (Central Daylight Time)           |
| By:             | Connie Fitzpatrick (cfitzpatrick@dgcoks.gov) |
| Status:         | Signed                                       |
| Transaction ID: | CBJCHBCAABAAmfaM1mhff6iUEWm0LceGHLshi5TxT_V3 |

## "Douglas County Food Policy Council\_Recommendations for Wa ste Plans.docx" History

-  Document created by Connie Fitzpatrick (cfitzpatrick@dgcoks.gov)  
2026-07-31 - 9:42:52 AM CDT
-  Document emailed to Ben Sikes (bensikes@gmail.com) for signature  
2026-07-31 - 9:44:03 AM CDT
-  Email viewed by Ben Sikes (bensikes@gmail.com)  
2026-07-31 - 2:58:54 PM CDT
-  Document e-signed by Ben Sikes (bensikes@gmail.com)  
Signature Date: 2026-07-31 - 3:05:06 PM CDT - Time Source: server - Signature Appearance Selected: DRAW
-  Document emailed to Quinlan Carttar (qcarttar@gmail.com) for signature  
2026-07-31 - 3:05:08 PM CDT
-  Email viewed by Quinlan Carttar (qcarttar@gmail.com)  
2026-07-31 - 3:07:56 PM CDT
-  Document e-signed by Quinlan Carttar (qcarttar@gmail.com)  
Signature Date: 2026-07-31 - 3:20:20 PM CDT - Time Source: server- Signature captured from device with phone number XXXXXXXX7668 -  
Signature Appearance Selected: MOBILE\_DRAW
-  Agreement completed.  
2026-07-31 - 3:20:20 PM CDT