
Committee Meeting

of

SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY COMMITTEE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND SOLID WASTE COMMITTEE

“The Committees will receive testimony from invited guests on the topic of food waste reduction and food waste disposal methods in the State, and how State policy can support sustainable and environmentally friendly food management practices”

LOCATION: Committee Room 4
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: April 23, 2025
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator Bob Smith, Chair
Senator Linda R. Greenstein, Vice Chair
Senator Latham Tiver
Assemblyman James J. Kennedy, Chair
Assemblywoman Alixon Collazos-Gill
Assemblywoman Garnet R. Hall



ALSO PRESENT:

Eric Hansen
Christina Denney
Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aides

Sadie Novak
Celia Smits
Senate Majority
Committee Aides

Thea M. Sheridan
Senate Republican
Committee Aide

Elizabeth Theodore
Assembly Majority
Committee Aide

Ashley Jaramillo
Assembly Republican
Committee Aide

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

Bob Smith
Chair

Linda R. Greenstein
Vice-Chair

John F. McKeon
Parker Space
Latham Tiver

Eric Hansen
Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide
609-847-3855



NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE
SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND
ENERGY COMMITTEE

STATE HOUSE ANNEX · P.O. BOX 068 · TRENTON, NJ 08625-0068
www.njleg.gov

COMMITTEE NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY COMMITTEE
FROM: SENATOR BOB SMITH, CHAIRMAN
SUBJECT: COMMITTEE MEETING - APRIL 23, 2025

The public may address comments and questions to Eric Hansen, Committee Aide, or make bill status and scheduling inquiries to Stephanie Cenneno, Secretary, at (609)847-3855 or e-mail: OLSAideSEN@njleg.org. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the committee by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

The Senate Environment and Energy Committee and the Assembly Environment, Natural Resources, and Solid Waste Committee will meet on Wednesday, April 23, 2025 at 10:00 AM in Committee Room 4, 1st Floor, State House Annex, Trenton, New Jersey.

The committees will receive testimony from invited guests on the topic of food waste reduction and food waste disposal methods in the State, and how State policy can support sustainable and environmentally friendly food management practices.

Issued 4/16/25

For reasonable accommodation of a disability call the telephone number above or for persons with hearing loss dial 711 for NJ Relay. The provision of assistive listening devices requires 24 hours' notice. CART or sign language interpretation requires 5 days' notice.

For changes in schedule due to snow or other emergencies, see website <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us> or call 800-792-8630 (toll-free in NJ) or 609-847-3905.

James J. Kennedy
Chair

Shavonda E. Sumter
Vice-Chair

Allixon Collazos-Gill
Garnet R. Hall
Andrea Katz
Michael Inganamort
Gerry Scharfenberger

Christina Denney
Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide
609-847-3855



NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE

ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND SOLID WASTE COMMITTEE

STATE HOUSE ANNEX · P.O. BOX 068 · TRENTON, NJ 08625-0068
www.njleg.gov

COMMITTEE NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND
SOLID WASTE COMMITTEE

FROM: ASSEMBLYMAN JAMES J. KENNEDY, CHAIRMAN

SUBJECT: COMMITTEE MEETING - APRIL 23, 2025

The public may address comments and questions to Christina Denney, Committee Aide, or make bill status and scheduling inquiries to Melissa Berrios, Secretary, at (609)847-3855 or e-mail: OLSAideAEN@njleg.org. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the committee by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

The Assembly Environment, Natural Resources, and Solid Waste Committee and the Senate Environment and Energy Committee will meet on Wednesday, April 23, 2025 at 10:00 AM in Committee Room 4, 1st Floor, State House Annex, Trenton, New Jersey.

The committees will receive testimony from invited guests on the topic of food waste reduction and food waste disposal methods in the State, and how State policy can support sustainable and environmentally friendly food management practices.

Issued 4/16/25

For reasonable accommodation of a disability call the telephone number above or for persons with hearing loss dial 711 for NJ Relay. The provision of assistive listening devices requires 24 hours' notice. CART or sign language interpretation requires 5 days' notice.

For changes in schedule due to snow or other emergencies, see website <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us> or call 800-792-8630 (toll-free in NJ) or 609-847-3905.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Serpil Guran, Ph.D. Director Rutgers EcoComplex, and Faculty Agriculture, Food, and Resource Economics Department Rutgers University | 4 |
| Sara Elnakib, Ph.D. Chair/Program Leader Department of Family and Community Health Sciences Rutgers University, and Associate Director Rutgers Cooperative Extension | 9 |
| Zach Shaben U.S. and Canada Public Affairs Manager Too Good To Go | 15 |
| Karen Lemon Board Chair Share My Meals | 21 |
| Hélène Lanctuit CEO Share My Meals, and Co-Chair New Jersey Meal Recovery Coalition | 23 |
| Brian Blair General Manager Trenton Renewables | 28 |
| Gary Sondermeyer Representing Association of New Jersey Recyclers (ANJR) | 37 |
| Dennis Toft, Esq. Chair, Environmental Department Chiesa, Shahinian & Giantomasi PC | 48 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

| | |
|--|-----|
| Christina PioCosta-Lahue Founder and President Vivaria Ecologics | 49 |
| Matthew Wasserman Vice President and Advocacy Chair NJ Composting Council | 51 |
| APPENDIX: | |
| Testimony submitted by Zach Shaben | 1x |
| Testimony submitted by Gary Sondermeyer | 7x |
| Testimony submitted by Christina PioCosta-Lahue | 14x |
| Testimony submitted by Mark Dinglasan Executive Director New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate | 17x |
| mej: 1-57 | |

SENATOR BOB SMITH (Chair): Good morning, and welcome to the two most interesting committees in the Legislature.

SENATOR LINDA R. GREENSTEIN (Vice Chair):
(laughter)

SENATOR SMITH: And, as is our tradition, we try to have an Earth Day hearing to focus on an environmental issue.

There are no bills on the agenda today, but a lot of discussion of policy.

Today, we are talking about food waste prevention in New Jersey. Everybody knows the statistics -- I think -- in this room, which is you waste -- *we*, all of us -- waste at least 50% of the food that comes through our homes, which is a terrible thing. It's terrible because we have food-challenged people all over New Jersey who might be able to benefit from that in some way, and most importantly -- not *most* importantly, but very importantly -- food waste has a dramatic impact on global climate change. When we put it in landfills -- which is probably one of the worst places to put it -- they leak methane gas as anaerobic digestion is occurring, and methane has a factor of at least 20 times greater -- maybe greater than that -- in terms of the impact on global climate change.

So, we really need to get our food waste act together. We have a partner -- Assemblyman Kennedy, Chair of the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee -- very much in tune with food waste issues, as are all the members. And, Speaker Coughlin is a real champ on food waste; he sponsors and gets food waste bills passed at his -- at every convenience. I'm going to put it in an advertisement.

I think the single best thing we could do to reduce food waste in New Jersey is to pass a bill that's in the Senate -- and, I think also in the Assembly -- which says that the local solid waste advisory committees -- every county in the state has a SWAC -- should add, as a mandatory element of their master plan for solid waste in their county, the reduction in food waste. I think that would go a long way to getting us in a better place than we are now.

Now, that being said, introducing members on my side. We have Senator Tiver; Senator Greenstein.

Assemblyman Kennedy, Chairman of the Assembly side, would you like to say a few words?

ASSEMBLYMAN JAMES J. KENNEDY (Chair): Bob has said it all. (laughter)

That's my words. (laughter)

SENATOR SMITH: OK, want to introduce your members?

ASSEMBLYMAN KENNEDY: (indiscernible)

SENATOR SMITH: OK.

So, that being said, we have an agenda.

Let's start with Dr. Guran; Director of the Rutgers EcoComplex. Dr. Guran has been before both Environment Committees on numerous occasions, and this is really one of her specialty items in her background.

And, like we currently said, she's managing the EcoComplex -- its operation programs; they have business incubators in the EcoComplex. And, she has been a leader in this field.

So, Dr. Guran, if you'd come forward, we'd appreciate it. We'd love to hear what you have to say on the topic.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We might have to do roll call first.

SENATOR SMITH: Oh, but it would be a good idea to know who's present.

So, can we do a roll call in both Committees first.

MR. HANSEN: Senator Smith.

SENATOR SMITH: I am present.

MR. HANSEN: Senator Greenstein.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: Here.

MR. HANSEN: Senator McKeon is absent.

Senator Space is absent.

Senator Tiver.

SENATOR TIVER: Here.

MR. HANSEN: Assemblyman Kennedy.

ASSEMBLYMAN KENNEDY: Here.

MR. HANSEN: Assemblywoman Sumter is absent.

Assemblywoman Collazos-Gill.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN COLLAZOS-GILL: Here.

MR. HANSEN: Assemblywoman Hall is absent.

Assemblyman Inganamort is absent.

Assemblywoman Katz is absent.

And, Assemblyman Scharfenberger is absent.

MS. DENNEY: Assemblywoman Hall is coming late.

MR. HANSEN: Oh, I'm sorry.

SENATOR SMITH: Thank you.

And, Chairman Kennedy, if it's OK, we'll start with our first witness.

ASSEMBLYMAN KENNEDY: Sure.

SENATOR SMITH: OK.

Dr. Guran.

S E R P I L G U R A N, Ph.D.: Good morning, honorable members of Senate -- New Jersey Senate and Assembly Environment and Energy Committee members.

My name is Serpil Guran; I serve as a faculty member of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics Department of Rutgers University, and serve as the Director of Rutgers' EcoComplex Clean Energy Innovation Center. I also serve as the Technical Committee -- Technical Subcommittee -- Chair of New Jersey Governor's Food Waste Recycling and Market Development Council.

My current teaching and research involves sustainable matters and improvements of waste management practices. Specifically, I teach Circular Economy, which involves transforming current linear waste management practices, which are manufactured, used, and disposed to circular resource recovery. This approach promotes returning components of waste back into the economy to promote sustainability, efficient resource management, and mitigation of climate change.

Food waste is one of the components of waste; a stream that we need to apply circularity concepts. It is estimated that 40% of all food globally is wasted; we all know that. In New Jersey, approximately 22% of waste stream consists of food waste -- maybe a little less; maybe a little more. For the year 2020, approximately 6 million tons of waste -- not food waste; waste, municipal solid waste -- was disposed, according to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. That translates approximately 1.3

million tons of food waste in the waste stream. This represents a missed opportunity environmentally, socially, and economically, since food is very expensive -- especially now. Additionally, food has high carbon footprint and very high water footprint, so it should not be wasted.

Currently, New Jersey has two important roles -- everybody knows. One was promulgated in 2017, which requires food waste reduction from levels of 2017 at 50% of 2030. The second one was promulgated in 2020; it's about food waste recycling. Food waste generation reduction and food waste recycling are equally important, because we understand that there is avoidable food waste. There is possibly avoidable food waste, but, also, there is unavoidable food waste. Avoidable food waste -- if we look into the definitions -- avoidable food waste is food and drink thrown away that was, at some point prior to disposal, edible, such as a slice of bread, or an apple. Possibly avoidable food waste refers to food and drink that some people eat; some others do not consume. That could be a bread crust, or potato skins. There is also a very important component in the waste; it is unavoidable food waste refers to waste arising from food and drink preparation that is not and has not been edible under normal circumstances, such as bones -- animal bones -- coffee grounds; egg shells; skins of certain vegetables.

All types of food-related waste, if they end up in the waste bin, should be recycled and put back into the economy in the most beneficial way. In order to achieve efficient food waste recycling, we need (indiscernible) performing recycling facilities, and also efficient food waste collection infrastructure in the state. Currently, majority of food waste still ends up in landfills. Since New Jersey -- in New Jersey, we do not have well-established -- yet -- infrastructures; infrastructural food -- source-separated food waste

collection and recycling facilities throughout the state yet. And, food waste recycling currently only requires certain food waste generators to do the recycling. When food waste ends up in landfills, only landfill gas is generated. Landfill gas is not fully recovered at the landfills, and leaks into the atmosphere in the methane form.

Another important point is the nutrients in the food waste that are buried forever in the way -- landfills (indiscernible). Methane has global warming potential from 30 to 80, depending on how you're looking to that, more than CO₂ global warming potential. Additionally, because landfill gas has impurities such as siloxanes, landfill gas needs to be clean before it is utilized to generate power. So, the landfills are not even generating power in New Jersey from recovered landfill gas, since landfill gas cleaning is costly; they are simply flaring it. Renewable energies are being flared, basically. Natural gas is abundant and cheap, so landfill gas energy cannot compete with cleaning and generating power in certain landfills.

If food waste ends up in wastewater treatment facilities, this time, they are anaerobically digested and biogas is recovered. However -- however -- similar to landfills, the nutrients in the food waste are not recovered since food waste gets mixed with residential waste. We are not closing the loop fully, unfortunately. Therefore, efficient recycling of food waste should promote composting and also source-separated food waste and anaerobic digestion -- which, both technologies are very efficient and proven.

In some cases -- in the case of composting -- all the nutrients and carbon in the food waste can be returned to the soil. In the case of food waste and anaerobic digestion, biogas with no contamination can be recovered without leaking into the atmosphere, and digested, also can be utilized for

soil remediation, because it is not contaminated. And, it is a great example that nutrients are not wasted.

The State may consider incentivizing composting and biogas generation from source-separated food waste further. They are much cleaner than landfill gas, and both efficient carbon savings -- composting and food waste, anaerobic digestion. And, they are carbon savings, sustainable to pathways to provide support to accelerate infrastructure development in New Jersey. Composting and anaerobic digestion technologies can efficiently contribute to improving states' food waste and recycling and market development efforts within circularity -- circular economy framework.

Additionally, the State may consider demonstration projects that would involve co-locating these two efficient technologies, which are food waste composting and food waste AD technologies within landfill practices, because we need to transform our current landfill operations for 21st-century needs. In the case landfills would still receive food waste, but in the source-separated manner. And, they can put the food waste in a digester -- not burying the valuable nutrients underground in the cells so they can generate uncontaminated biogas, and they can recover fully, not leaking into the atmosphere.

And, so, a source-separated manner and instead of burying food waste in the landfill cells, they will generate uncontaminated biogas in a digester. And, this also would bring additional revenue for their operations. Demonstration projects would reveal invaluable data to the -- on the pros and cons of locating stand-alone anaerobic digestion applications within or nearby landfill operations. This is going to help the State to transform current complaint landfilling processes within the state. This approach, again, will

help the State to accelerate efficient food waste recycling efforts for the future.

Thank you for your attention.

SENATOR SMITH: Any questions for the good doctor, Dr. Guran?

Let me just mention, if I can, two experiences I had in the last 12 months with -- I think -- maybe advanced systems; compared to America.

I was in Quebec for an NCEL program. And, in Quebec, in the -- on the street corners they have what are, in effect, food waste collection containers. Everybody brings their food waste to the container, and I then went to a plant where they recycled it and not only did they take some materials from it, but they also did anaerobic digestion, made gas, made electricity -- and they did -- this is the entire City of Quebec, you're talking probably a million-plus people.

And, this, in the last month, I had the opportunity to be in Europe and in Italy -- and, in Italy, you don't have individual containers for your garbage. They have on the street a container system -- five different classifications. You put your cardboard and paper in one; your organic food waste in another; bottles in another; etc. But, they don't have individual collection. You bring your stuff out to the street to that container; it gets separated. And, I assume -- because I wasn't there for an environmental purpose -- but they then do the recycling and anaerobic digestion.

New Jersey, we've been at the 50% limit forever. We do 50% of the recycling we should do, and I think the new frontier is getting food waste. If we can get food waste in that, we do so many good things for global climate change and for our residents, too.

So, thank you very much for your comments today.

DR. GURAN: Thank you.

SENATOR SMITH: And, if you ever have any good legislative ideas, please send them to--

DR. GURAN: Thank you--

SENATOR SMITH: --Assemblyman Kennedy and myself, we'd be happy to try to get them passed with your permission.

Dr. Sara EL-NAH-KEEB -- am I saying it right, Doc?

You're an Associate Professor and Chairman of the Department of Family and Community Health Sciences at Rutgers Cooperative Extension. Her research focuses on the use of policy, systems, and environmental approaches to promote child health equity and environmental stewardship -- primarily in school and community settings.

Doc.

S A R A E L N A K I B, Ph.D.: Thank you so much, Senator Smith, Assemblyman Kennedy, and to both Agriculture Assembly -- I mean Environment Assembly and Senate Committees.

My name, as you mentioned, is Sara Elnakib; I am the Chair of the Family and Community Health Sciences Department at Rutgers Cooperative Extension. If you all are familiar with Cooperative Extension, we have a house in every county -- in all 21 counties -- and we focus on bringing the research that's happening at the University into the communities that we serve. And, so, we're very fortunate to work closely with community stakeholders to really find solutions for some of these big problems like food waste.

So, I'll start with an introduction to food waste. Obviously, food waste is more than just discarded leftovers. When we waste food we waste time, energy, labor, water, and all the resources that go into developing and processing that food. At the same time, food that is wasted ends up in a landfill, which costs us money and has a lot of detrimental environmental impacts. As my colleague mentioned, methane gas that is produced from food that is wasted in the landfill creates a more potent gas than carbon dioxide. And, so, we talk a lot about carbon emissions and decreasing carbon emissions, but, really, food waste can be one of the ways we really impact climate change -- especially for future generations.

In the United States, a staggering 30-40% of food is wasted. That's nearly almost half; it's a third to half of our food. And, that's roughly 80 billion pounds of food. On average, that's about 20 pounds per person per month. And, so, when we think about grocery bills these days, that's a lot of money that can be going back into people's pockets. And, the majority of that waste happens at the consumer level. So, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, and a nonprofit -- national nonprofit -- that leads on food waste called ReFED, nearly half of surplus food comes from uneaten groceries and food that's left over in restaurants. And, so, that's a big place for us to make a really big impact. And, that counts for about \$261 billion -- with a "b." So, that's a lot of money that we can support in bringing back to local economies and local communities.

As a consequence, beyond economics, food waste is -- has major environmental and social impacts. And, so, food waste globally -- if it was a country -- it would be the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gas, after China and the United States. So, globally, it's a big issue, and here domestically,

obviously, the same. Additionally, with one in 10 Americans going home hungry, and about 13.7 million households who are food insecure, this is a problem we shouldn't have, where we have so much food we're throwing it out and not enough food to feed our people.

And, all the food that we're throwing out is nutrient-dense food. It's high in fiber; potassium; and essential vitamins. And, so, it's perfectly good food in a lot of cases.

At Rutgers Cooperative Extension, our Food Waste Team has been really tackling the issue of food waste head on since 2017. And, I'm proud to say that we've supported schools, health inspectors, food rescue organizations, and others across the state in 11 of our 21 counties. And, we've implemented food waste audits where we actually go out there, get dirty, and start measuring some food waste. We also do a lot of trainings for food service staff and education for students. And, we were supported by a lot of different grants, including N.J. DEP, U.S. EPA, and others to work to divert thousands of pounds of food from the landfills.

And, we follow the EPA's food recovery hierarchy, with focusing on prevention of food waste at the source. So, trying to help schools buy and serve just about what they need, or when there is surplus, we try to promote safe food donation and upcycling. And, so, to ensure that we get the most out of the nutrients, the calories, and what food is really meant for -- which is to feed people.

So, my recommendations for this Joint Committee is really a few. And, so, the first series are really policy recommendations to strengthen the State's guidance on food donation. Food donation -- we've seen other states adopt really strict kind of very clear food donation policies, and we have

model policies from Washington and Maine that we can adapt. And, so, we're working with colleagues from Share Our Meals and -- to lead a coalition that includes the Department of Health, Department of Environmental Protection, to really support food donation guidelines, so that everyone knows what is allowed and what is not allowed in New Jersey.

Additionally, to support district-level composting policies in the state. So, if you have a composter in one school district -- I mean, from one school in your district, you can't take food from another school location to that district currently. So, if you have two schools across the street, they can't share a composter, and that creates a lot of inefficiencies. And, so, working on policies to support districtwide food donation or food composting we would be really supportive.

Also, leveraging our new climate change education requirements. So, New Jersey was the first state to require climate change education in K-12 schools, which was a huge win for New Jersey students. So, using those K-12 requirements to really include food waste and sustainability in the climate change discussion.

And, then, for training and capacity building, really expanding food waste training for schools' food service staff; focusing on prevention and safe food handling; and donating best practices. So, we have lots of resources that are free for schools, but oftentimes schools are overwhelmed with all of their day-to-day activities that they can't do it themselves. So, supporting technical assistance can really help bridge that gap and help them take action.

And, then, finally, some of the funding recommendations include investing in some of that technical assistance and training programs for schools to prevent food waste, and increase sustainability and equity in the

schools. Stakeholder engagement -- so, really ensuring that municipal health inspectors are connected to food donation sites, and connected to the schools. And, so, that's something that we often hear in schools -- they say, "Oh, we're not allowed to donate, our health inspector will get us in trouble," but, really, the idea is that health inspectors want to ensure safety, and the food we don't want to waste. And, so, we're really connecting those dots together and ensuring that health inspectors are supporting the food donation and the schools are doing the food donation properly and safely to ensure improvement for human health.

Engaging students in citizen science and academic partnership to support public awareness and involvement. So, unless you're someone who is crazy about food waste like we are, you don't know that this is such a big problem. And, so, this idea of really expanding information; getting it into a lot of people's minds, because just knowing it will allow you to change your behavior and make certain actions to reduce food waste.

And, then, mandating share tables in every New Jersey school. Share tables are an easy way for us to get food that is excess in schools into other students or food pantries and soup kitchens. And, so, ensuring that they are done safely and mandating them in every school can be an easy way to get started.

And, then, finally, really tapping into the colleges and universities. So, there is a college and university all across the state, and so trying to support pilot projects for innovative food waste solutions that are both sustainable and support food security is another.

So, food waste is one of the most solvable challenges we have today, and is one of the most wide-reaching impacts for environmental,

economic, and community impacts. And, so, we can coordinate policy, education, and action across the state to be able to help build a sustainable food system.

Thank you so much.

SENATOR SMITH: So, what fraction of food waste in New Jersey is related to our schools and institutions? If you know.

DR. ELNAKIB: Yes, so, we don't know that number specifically, but we can estimate based on the fact that more than 50% of the food waste that occurs happens at the consumer level, and children have at least two to two and a half meals at school.

And, so, based on those estimations, you can estimate maybe about 25% of food waste that's happening across the state is from food service in schools.

SENATOR SMITH: Did you give us a copy of your testimony?

DR. ELNAKIB: Of course; yes.

SENATOR SMITH: I think there's a couple of bills in there that--

DR. ELNAKIB: Yes--

SENATOR SMITH: --our members may want to sponsor or look at further. So, we would appreciate copies--

DR. ELNAKIB: Of course--

SENATOR SMITH: --for both Committees.

How many copies do we need? I guess we need one, and we can make a -- a copy of it.

DR. ELNAKIB: (laughter)

SENATOR SMITH: But, if you could provide that.

Any questions for the doc? (no response)

Thank you for coming down today.

DR. ELNAKIB: Thank you.

SENATOR SMITH: We both appreciate it.

DR. ELNAKIB: Thank you.

SENATOR SMITH: And, again, with your intelligence, Chairman.

Our third witness is Zach SHA-BEAN, U.S. and Canada Public Affairs Manager for a program called Too Good To Go. And, according to the website for Too Good To Go, it was founded in 2016 in Copenhagen to fight food waste. In nine years, the company has grown to over 100 million registered users, and 175,000 active business partners across 19 countries in Europe in North America. Too Good To Go cites that they have saved over 400 million meals from being wasted, which is the equivalent of 1.1 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions avoided. Too Good To Go's focus is to help save good food from going to waste.

Mr. SHA-BEAN -- and, I don't know if I'm saying that properly.

ZACH SHABEN: You got close. (laughter)

SENATOR SMITH: OK, what's the correct pronunciation?

MR. SHABEN: SHAY-BEN.

SENATOR SMITH: OK--

MR. SHABEN: But, that's all right; I won't hold it against you.

SENATOR SMITH: Take it away.

MR. SHABEN: Good morning, everyone; members of the Committee in the Senate and Assembly.

And, thank you, Chairman Smith, for the invitation to speak today.

And, also, thank you to the ranking members.

This opportunity is really important, and food waste is a major issue, so I am not going to take too much of your time.

But, my name is Zach Shaben; I am the Public Affairs Manager for Too Good To Go, a social impact company founded in 2016 with a mission to reduce food waste while supporting local businesses and increasing consumer access to high-quality food. We aim to inspire and empower everyone to dream of a planet without food waste.

Too Good To Go operates the world's largest business-to-consumer marketplace for surplus food, connecting businesses that have unsold, high-quality food with consumers who can purchase it at one-third of retail price. We operate in 19 countries on three continents and all 50 states. Since 2020, nearly 1,700 unique New Jersey stores have partnered with us to save over 1,138,800 meals -- or, 2.5 million pounds of food -- from landfills. This equates to the prevention of 6.7 million pounds of CO₂E that would have been emitted if this food had not been sold on the Too Good To Go marketplace.

I am here today to express our strong support for policies that promote food waste reduction that makes sense for businesses, people, and the planet. Too Good To Go-- The Too Good To Go model proves that there's an economic case for food waste reduction that benefits businesses, people, government, and the environment. Nationwide, it's estimated that 31% -- or 73.9 million tons -- of food generated becomes surplus. That equates to \$382 billion worth of food that's wasted each year, and signifies

an economic opportunity waiting to be unleashed. New Jersey businesses sell their surplus food-- New Jersey businesses selling their surplus food on Too Good To Go saw the recouping of approximately \$3.7 million that would have been lost if our marketplace did not exist. Encouraging businesses to use solutions like Too Good To Go can compliment donation; reduce food waste; and support business operations.

In addition to markdown sales, a 2017 study from the World Resources Institute Champions 12.3 found that when businesses invest \$1 in food waste prevention, they saw a \$14 return. This return on investment was achieved by not buying food that would have been lost or wasted through better inventory management; increasing the share of food that is sold to customers; introducing new product lines made from food that would have otherwise been lost or wasted; reducing waste management costs and other savings.

To effectively address food waste, policies *must* prioritize prevention. While charitable giving is invaluable, relying solely on donation will not be enough for New Jersey to achieve the Food Waste Reduction Act goal of halving food waste by 2030. Encouraging the adoption of markdown sales and other innovative models is not only environmentally sound, but also an opportunity for businesses in New Jersey who are often the pillars of their communities. For instance, in California, their mandatory donation law, SB1383, has seen an increase in quality donations to food banks, but food is still being lost and not being captured when waste continues from unwanted donation capacity constraints and a lack of priority for prevention methods further up the food system in the food waste hierarchy.

There's also a consumer case-- The financial impact of food lost and waste on individuals is substantial; particularly in the context of rising grocery prices, economic instability caused by tariffs. There's \$382 billion worth of surplus food that is wasted. U.S. households account for \$150 billion of that figure. For the average four-person household, the USDA estimates that \$1,500 is lost annually due to uneaten food. Other estimates place this figure as high as \$3,000 per year. Consumers are throwing away their hard-earned money at a time when they cannot afford to.

Date label confusion from U.S. consumers has resulted in the loss of 3 billion pounds of edible surplus food annually in the home, valued at \$7 billion. There are over 50 date label regulations across the U.S., creating a patchwork of regulations -- or, in many cases, no regulations at all. Around -- no regulations all around what date labels mean; when they can be used; and how they are phrased. Consumers often misinterpret date labels on food, discarding items that are safe to eat. In reality, most food remains safe for consumption beyond the printed date, which usually reflects the manufacturer's estimate of peak quality time. Date labels should be standardized in the state into two categories: "Best if used by," to indicate quality; and "use by" to indicate safety. Combining these phrases with education and reminders like using senses -- like look; smell; taste -- will empower consumers to make smarter decisions and stretch their groceries to last longer.

To effectively combat food waste and achieve the goals outlined in the Food Waste Reduction Act, it is imperative to implement robust and flexible policies. These policies should not only prioritize prevention, but also should incentivize businesses to adopt sustainable practices like

markdown sales; improved inventory management -- and, improved inventory management. By fostering an environment that benefits both businesses and consumers, we can make significant strides in reducing food waste, conserving resources, and creating a more sustainable future for New Jersey.

I urge both Committees to support prevention policies that benefit businesses, people, and the planet.

Thank you.

SENATOR SMITH: So, what I was listening for was your business model. Do I understand this correctly: You have a relationship with various restaurants; they cook meals. If they're unsold, you offer them for sale. Or, am I wrong?

MR. SHABEN: You're correct on that. So, the way it works is a business partner -- which can be a grocery store; bakery; coffee shop; convenience store -- has surplus food at the end of the day, whether it's prepared foods or grocery items.

We have our product, which is called "the surprise bag," and that is a mystery bag that consumers purchase. So, the business owner would package whatever leftover food they have in that bag. The surprise bag is pre-sold on our platform to a consumer; the consumer is then sent into the store to go pick up the bag at one-third the retail price. So, that--

SENATOR SMITH: One-third?

MR. SHABEN: Yes--

SENATOR SMITH: That's your number?

MR. SHABEN: So, if you're Whole Foods, for example, on our platform, their prepared food bag is valued at \$30, but a consumer would pay \$10.

SENATOR SMITH: OK. Are you doing any of this in New Jersey now?

MR. SHABEN: We are. We have nearly 1,700 stores that have seen approximately \$3.7 million in revenue recouped from surplus food.

SENATOR SMITH: That's the revenue to them?

MR. SHABEN: Directly to them, yes.

SENATOR SMITH: You guys must collect the vigorish.

MR. SHABEN: We do. So, the way it works is there's an \$89 annual fee to be listed on the Too Good To Go platform, and then we take an additional -- it depends on the value of the bag, but roughly -- the average is \$1.70 from each sale. The typical surprise bag is valued -- is sold at \$5. So, from that, about \$3.3 will go directly to the store.

SENATOR SMITH: OK.

Questions for Zach? Anybody? (no response)

OK, Chairman, with your indulgence, let's ask Hélène -- and, Hélène, I am going to lose on the pronunciation. L-A-N-C-T-U-I-T; Co-Chair of the New Jersey Meal Recovery Coalition; CEO of Share My Meals; Karen Lemon, Board Chair of Share My Meals.

And, by way of a little description, from the New Jersey Recovery -- New Jersey Meal Recovery Coalition -- website, this is a new alliance. The Meal Recovery Coalition brings together New Jersey corporations; hospitals, and educational institutions; government entities; nonprofit organizations;

and individual volunteers to work together to make meal recovery the norm in New Jersey.

If both of you would come up, that would be great.

Take it away.

KAREN LEMON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you Honorable members for having us today and for your attention.

So, as you said, we're from Share My Meals. I am Karen Lemon; I am the Chairman of the Board. And, Share My Meals is a nonprofit; it was founded in 2020. And, our mission is to fight food insecurity *and* -- so, dual mission -- and fight the environmental impact of food waste by recovering and delivering healthy meals.

And, so, what that looks like-- So, what we do is work with those who have meals to donate. And, those are corporations; universities; hospitals. So, think of no -- really close to here, Novo Nordisk; Capital Health; Rider University. And, then, what we do is we connect them with nonprofits who support food insecurity people, or we identify families who are food insecure, and we connect those healthy meals with food insecure people.

So, how we do that connection: First of all, we use volunteers to deliver those meals for the vast majority. We have a few part-time drivers who we've been able to create employment in New Jersey. Secondly, we've worked with local and State officials to put in place a food handling policy. So, we pick up-- You've all been to a corporate cafeteria, right? They're amazing meals. And, so, they all go into the trash at the end of the day. So, instead, we pick those up, and we want to make sure that that incredible meal is incredible when we get that out to the food insecure people in New Jersey.

And, then, lastly, to make that connection, we've put in place a technology platform. And, let me just try to-- You asked the other gentleman about his model. Here's kind of what it looks like: The meal donors -- we provide them reusable trays. We put a barcode on there. When they have meals to donate, they digitally notify us, and then we send the volunteer out to pick those up. They scan those; that allows us to track them until they are delivered at the nonprofit. Not only does it keep the food safe, so we can track that in the meantime, it also then gives us a dashboard of the meals that we are providing to the local communities and the waste that has not gone into a landfill. So, we're able to track that.

So, what's the opportunity in New Jersey? So, according to ReFED, of the food waste -- which you've heard a lot about today -- about 45,000 tons annually, in New Jersey, are meals. And, again, these are meals that were never on a plate, so these aren't your scraps; these are meals that were prepared that were never provided. So, that's 45 -- that translates to almost 75 million meals--

SENATOR SMITH: Wow--

MS. LEMON: --a year that would be available, and that are currently going into a landfill.

So, we've worked pro-bono with McKinsey, and we think -- very conservatively -- we can go after about 5 million of those meals every year. And, additionally with McKinsey, we looked at what's the value of that meal. So, for every dollar that we spend on meal recovery, New Jersey -- the benefit to New Jersey -- is \$14. And, that comes from cost avoidance; from greenhouse gas emissions; and, then, also, from the health benefit. And, by the way, it's primarily the health benefit of having a healthy, nutritious meal.

So, last year, no -- this year, we're going to do 250,000 meals. But, there's 5 million out there. So, we stepped back and said, "If we want to go after those 5 million, we can't do that alone; we need partners --" like Sara, who was just up here. And, so, we formed the Meal Recovery Coalition to really make meal recovery the norm.

And, Hélène is going to take you through the Meal Recovery Coalition.

HÉLÈNE LANCTUIT: Thank you, Karen, and good morning.

Yes, we found out that we had to do this collaboratively, and this is why we launched the Meal Recovery Coalition last year. This is an initiative that is endorsed by Governor Murphy and Speaker Coughlin, and it is a group of organizations working together with community service groups like ourselves, but also our peers; food rescue organizations; State, local governments; to address food waste and food insecurity through meal recovery, and with a vision to make meal recovery the norm.

Share My Meals is leading this initiative. I am the Co-Chair, together with Olivier Bogillot, who is the General Manager of Sanofi North America. And, we have eight other corporations as members, including Bristol Myers Squibb; Novo Nordisk; Johnson & Johnson; Novartis; Campbell's; Capital Health; Merck; and Dartcor, which is a New Jersey-based food service provider.

As Karen said, prepared food service represents a large share of generated food waste in New Jersey, and we see this initiative as extremely innovative and potentially very impactful, complimenting existing emergency food systems. The Coalition aims to raise visibility on those two interlinked issues; create sustainable funding to improve capabilities around meal

recovery; activate stakeholders; and, eventually, serve as a template for other states to implement.

I want to mention one key initiative that Dr. Sara Elnakib mentioned before -- that is the development of comprehensive sets of guidelines for meal recovery across New Jersey, along with a training material. So, this is a group of multi-stakeholders that we've put together. We work monthly, and we have as an objective to deliver those guidelines this summer. The group is comprised of peers of food rescue organizations, but also food waste generators; food service providers. We have the biggest group, Sodexo (indiscernible) in this. And, we are very fortunate to have the Department of Health, as well as Department of Environmental Protection, as part of this working group. And, the Department of Health would like to integrate those guidelines as an annex to the New Jersey food code, which is Chapter 24.

So, we're hoping that this -- these guidelines -- would support a training of local health inspectors, and would support the recovery of more meals, more food, safely.

Finally, obviously, we-- Only strong policies will drive change and improve food recovery in New Jersey. We're eager to see County Food Recovery Planning Act as '24-'26 passing, and hoping that it will pass soon. The MRC will develop toolkits and support the development of knowledge to map out solutions to -- and provide those to counties.

SENATOR SMITH: So, S2426 -- is that the--

MS. LANCTUIT: Correct--

SENATOR SMITH: --bill that requires the local SWACs -- Solid Waste Advisory Committees -- to include food waste as an element of their planning for their county. Is that the one?

MS. LANCTUIT: Planning for their counties; yes.

SENATOR SMITH: And, by the way, we can send them copies of the transcript of this hearing, and they'd immediately start to incorporate some of these organizations to share meals or surplus food. It wouldn't be that hard for them to do it.

There's one other bill that I should ask your opinion on, which is date labeling. We have a food date labeling bill, which is the recommendation of the National Food Council.

MS. LANCTUIT: Correct.

SENATOR SMITH: But, in New Jersey, our local Food Council doesn't want us to adopt it because not every state has adopted their recommendations.

So, what we would do is adopt their recommendation on date labeling -- when is it-- What are the right words to use for, "use by," or--

MS. LANCTUIT: Absolutely--

SENATOR SMITH: "Not good after," things like that. They actually put the wording together.

Do you think that would be helpful? I know one of the prior witnesses said--

MS. LANCTUIT: Zach mentioned it, from Too Good To Go.

This is definitely a measure that we support, the clarification of date labeling. There is too much variability between states, and too much confusion even for food rescue organizations like ourselves. We're also recovering pre-packed, prepared food with a "sell by" date that is not meaningful; it's not an indication of food safety.

SENATOR SMITH: It was S200--

MS. LANCTUIT: Yes--

SENATOR SMITH: --in the '24-'25 session. But, we're going to reintroduce it and see if we can get it done this year.

But, any of the experts who are out there, if you have an opinion about food date labeling, we'd appreciate looking at the bill -- which is about to be filed -- but the version of it is S200 from the last session.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's this session.

SENATOR SMITH: What's that?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: This session.

SENATOR SMITH: Oh, I'm sorry -- *this* session. S200 is the bill, it's introduced, but we'd love to hear what you think about it.

And, I interrupted you; I apologize.

MS. LANCTUIT: No problem. (laughter)

We also support Bill S3889 to reduce campus food waste, which would require public colleges and universities to develop and implement food waste reduction programs. It has passed the Senate, and it is under review by the Assembly's Higher Education Committee.

In the coming years, we'll always push to see the edible portion of food waste recovered, and favored over food scrap recycling -- which is a fantastic solution, but not for edible food. One effective way would be for the State to consider introducing a state-specific tax incentive for food recovery. We know that 12 other states have implemented strong to moderate State tax incentives, including New York; Virginia; Maryland; and Pennsylvania.

With this, I want to thank the Committees; thank you very much.

SENATOR SMITH: And, did you leave copies of your testimony for us?

MS. LANCTUIT: We will send it to you, yes.

SENATOR SMITH: There's a couple of good bills in there, so--

MS. LANCTUIT: Thank you--

SENATOR SMITH: We'll share them with everybody.

Thank you so much.

Any questions from members of the -- either Committee?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HALL: I just wanted to have a comment.

I'm glad that you ended with what are you doing to prevent so many meals being prepared by the University. So, I'd like to see-- I'd like to see more about that also, and I am interested in looking at your testimony so we can see-- I saw a couple things, as the Chair did, that maybe we could do to help this move along.

So, thank you for your testimony this morning.

SENATOR SMITH: Thank you very much.

With your permission, Chairman: Brian Blair, General Manager of Trenton Renewables.

So, we have a success story in New Jersey -- and, by the way, not that far away; maybe 10 miles away.

By way of background, in -- maybe about four years ago? We did this food -- food waste legislation that said that if you generated more than 52 tons of food waste a year, *and* you had a food waste processing recycling facility, that you would use it; you have to use it. Four years later -- maybe five years later -- we only have two. One is Trenton Renewables, and the other I think is in the City of Elizabeth, where the local -- one of the

local grocery stores -- I think Shop Rite, but I'm not 100% sure -- will take unused chicken, it'll get processed, and it'll ultimately go to the digester for the Rahway Valley Sewer (*sic*) Authority. They use it to make biogas; generate electricity.

But, two successes are awful, because we probably have hundreds of failures. We'd like to get food waste really going, and Trenton Renewables is an outstanding example. You guys have been doing this for a while.

And, just by way of a little background, Trenton Renewables is a food waste recycling and renewable energy company located in Trenton, New Jersey. Trenton Renewables operates the Trenton Biogas facility. Trenton Renewables partners with cities and businesses of all sizes to recycle food waste into premium compost, organic fertilizer, and renewable biogas. The compost and fertilizer are sent to local farms, and the biogas is used on site to produce electricity that powers the facility and contributes to renewable energy to the grid when it's needed most.

And, that being said, Brian, you are the General Manager of Trenton Renewables. Please, tell us your story.

B R I A N B L A I R: Thank you, Senator Smith; Senator (*sic*) Kennedy; Environment and Energy Committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to stand before you here.

I've given about 30 presentations on Trenton Renewable power since we launched, and, my presentations generally carry a common theme about the sustainability of anaerobically digesting food waste. And, I get into the -- generally, into the specific details -- carbon offsets and all of the kind of feel-good stuff.

What's on my mind today is -- and, as far as messaging goes, is a little different than what I generally share. I was thinking about all the benefits of what we do, and the first story that came to mind is thinking back to the holiday function that our company had at Cooper's Riverside (*sic*). And, I'm sitting in a room; I have 35 people who have their significant others with them, all gathered around just to celebrate the holidays together. But, I have engineers; forklift operators; equipment operators; a chemist; technicians; welders. I have all different people, and we're all united by a common cause. And, we're different, but we're all bonded by the effort that we share together on a daily basis to process food waste and make electricity.

And, as I think about it today, that's probably the most important part of what we do. We've supported a lot of families from here in Trenton and from New Jersey -- my family included. We found a common ground, and we don't all agree -- everybody in that room -- on all things -- politics; sports. There's Giants fans in the room and Eagles fans in the room. But, we all have this common focus and purpose. And, it's important.

When we started the anaerobic digestion mission in 2005 -- that's how long we've been working on this mission in New Jersey -- introduced anaerobic digestion by a professor from Rutgers University back in 2005. Back then, there were few documents in the public domain that existed about food waste and anaerobic digestion studies. Today, there's loads of white papers; there's loads of studies; and, it seems that, as time goes on, that the data and the assumptions that are produced -- we're finding some variants in the data.

So, while there may be some discrepancies in the exact numbers -- in the hard numbers -- I think that the range that we've been analyzing and

opining on is accurate. And, we couple that data with five years-plus -- we're now in five and a half years of processing food waste to produce electricity in the State of New Jersey -- and, we look at all of the data and put it all together. The numbers are right, and we're on the right track.

We have a takeaway that we can present with really great certainty, based on operating data. Every single day when food comes in, we measure that food; we de-package that food; we process that food; we make electricity; and we make a soil nutrient that gets processed in a soil blending facility. So, people ask me questions about, "Well, where does that go?" and, "What about PFAS?" and, "What about--" Well, we've been working in this industry to solve problems, and to look ahead and solve problems. And, our soil goes to a soil-blending facility that they tell me they spend \$25,000 a day testing their soils that go out. I think that's extraordinary -- the compliance requirements to make sure that the soils that they're building are compliant with law. And, they look at PFAS; and, they look at metals; and, they look at all of the things that we should be looking at. But, it's expensive. And, that's part of the business.

So, the Trenton facility is designed to produce approximately 27,000 megawatt hours a year of electricity. It reduces CO₂E by 200,000 tons per year. I'm giving you rough numbers. Our life-cycle analysis suggests that it's 2.2 tons of CO₂E for every 1 ton of food that's entering the process. That's a significant number. We employ 35 people in the state, and these are jobs that never existed before. So, it's a new economy.

From our sources, when I step outside of this room-- I'm going to kind of go off-script for a minute. One of the things that really concerns me is that not everybody believes that climate change is our most significant

problem today. And, that concerns me. Some of my peers don't believe that that's the most significant issue of concern today. We're not on the same page on what it takes to -- and, what we should do -- to produce energy today.

So, when I think about that, and I think about how I wanna -- I want to pound my hand on the desk and say, "You *have* to do this; and this is all about the environment; and this is all about what's right," I realize I don't have to. And, I realize that we can all get on the same page by just looking at the facts. Even if you don't agree and you somehow don't believe that climate change is real, I'm certain you can agree that we need energy in the State of New Jersey, and that that energy should be safe, reliable, and affordable. When we combine the idea of safe, reliable, and affordable energy into sustainability, sometimes it gets difficult, because we get accused of -- it doesn't work without a subsidy.

In the Trenton Renewable Power Facility, that facility operates not from a subsidy, but it operates from a single individual who invested into that business without a single dollar returned to that person, with a very, very significant investment. And, the success of Trenton Renewable Power is based on that investment and the continued -- I'll call it stick-to-itiveness that myself and my team has put forward every single day through all obstacles to be successful. So, it wasn't through a subsidy, but it was through a lot of hard work from a team of people who just don't stop.

The reality of anaerobic digestion of food waste is that it's a complex business. And, as I look at the data, and I think about variation in data, the observation, and the assumption, I'll say my opinion is that the anaerobic digestion of food waste is sensitive to the geographic location of that digester. It's influenced by the waste that people generate in a weigh

shed. And, it may be a little bit different for the folks in Elizabeth who are launching a new project for a very large scale anaerobic digester; they're going to find some differences in their process. We want them to be successful; they need to be successful; and, we need more facilities to be successful. But, I think one of the things that I want to bring to the table today is that the process is influenced by regional food that's available; the weigh shed; the resources available to get the energy to the people.

The 27,000 megawatt hours a year that we produce in the City of Trenton is going into the PSE&G grid, and if you're on the PSE&G grid, you're consuming some of that energy. We consume about 400 kilowatts of electricity at our facility. And, what's interesting is that you can come into our facility any time day or night. The lights are on; the machines are running; and it's running on food. So, whether or not you agree with why we do it, every single time we've had somebody in our facility -- it doesn't matter who they are and what they think -- they can't get past the awesomeness of seeing raw food drop into the machine and electricity being produced on the backend. It's really fascinating.

And, what you can see with your eyes is that there's energy in that food. I'm a big advocate of getting the energy out of that food; it's available. I'm a big advocate of getting that energy, and using the resources that we have in the State of New Jersey, to get the energy out of that food. We have 22 wastewater treatment plants that can be super ignited by adding food to the-- That's 22 wastewater treatment plants that already have some type of energy recovery. We had food through that lethargic bio-solid sludge; we super-ignite the gas production; we make more energy for the grid. In the Scientific Advisory Board report from 2023, we learned from our own

scientists here in New Jersey that if we utilize all of those resources, the existing wastewater facilities -- if we utilize the resources of the landfill facilities, 11 landfills that are collecting gas -- we can generate, potentially, a terawatt of electricity. That's significant.

I think about-- I've heard the opinions about, "Well, it's really not a lot of energy; it's really not worth the investment." And, I think about the times when my gas gauge is teetering on empty; I've got a gallon left and I need to make it to the gas station or my vehicle is charged -- it's out of charge. I've got 0% left, and I've got to get to the charging station. It turns out that last little bit of energy is very important -- even though it's a little bit, it gets the job done. So, the little bit of energy that could be produced from using the resources that we have in the State, by putting some capital into the wastewater facilities, and some capital and some thought into landfill operations, you can collect that energy.

I think that the State agendas suggest that energy is our priority, and that climate is our priority. And, my personal experience is that I feel like I'm banging my head. Because when I show up and say, "Environment is important," then what gets measured is the ratepayer's wallet. I'm a ratepayer. I'm a taxpayer; I'm a ratepayer; and I care about the ratepayer's wallet. But, I think that the ratepayer's wallet should be measured against the social cost of climate; it should be measured against waste disposal costs; it should be measured against how many families that you're supporting by putting a process like this together. I think those are the tools to measure. And, when you add up all of those values for anaerobic digestion, you'll find that it's a plus across the board.

So, I fully support legislation that supports development of anaerobic digestion of food waste and organic material. I ask that we think about what we can do to put emphasis when we say it's priority in the State, that when our other departments are measuring the value of what those processes do, that they agree that it is priority at the State.

I have a comment about the food waste law. I think it is an amazing step forward in getting food waste collected. I would recommend a few amendments to the law to further the idea that more food can be collected, and that more food can be put to use. One of the suggestions is changing the radius -- I think we launched that program with a very safe 25-mile road radius in it, and I think it should be expanded to 50 miles. I think that when you get outside of 50 miles, the economics of transporting the food changed, and it doesn't make sense. I think that the carbon footprint of transporting the food changes and it doesn't make sense. But, I think 50 miles is a -- is the right number.

Regarding the food waste law, I believe that there's an exemption that's put into the law that -- and, I understand why -- but there's a situation where a strip mall or a mall has food-producing tenants, and because they're part of the strip mall, there is no owner of that food. And, that food is going into the can and into the landfill. And, my belief is that if you're at the mall or the strip mall, and you have food-producing tenants that are putting food waste in the can, then the owner of the strip mall, or the proprietor of the total property is the generator of that waste. And, that waste should be -- it should be the responsibility of the mall owner, or the strip mall owner, to collect all of the food from the generators in those malls, and get it to the proper source.

This is not a self-serving comment, because the other thing that I want to share -- and, hopefully, Matt Wasserman, who is sitting behind me, has a chance to speak -- but there's a place for anaerobic digestion of food waste, and there's a place for other mechanisms; there's a place for composting. When-- It doesn't make sense to transport. And, you don't have huge volumes; and you can't transport that food 50 miles away to get it, because you only have 500 pounds of it. It doesn't make sense. And, sometimes, a localized composting operation is the sensible solution.

Dr. Guran spoke to the idea of mixing the digestate from an anaerobic digestion facility with compost material -- it's a brilliant idea. It's an idea that excites and kind of helps the economics of a composting entity, and it's an idea that improves the quality of the end product. And, it's an idea that closes the loop; it gets that carbon back into the earth, and back into the growing process.

So, I've said a lot. Hopefully it was well received. And, from there, I would open to any questions.

SENATOR SMITH: Any questions for the manager of Trenton Biogas? (no response)

Keep up the good work.

MR. BLAIR: Thank you; thank you very much for the support.

SENATOR SMITH: All right, and, hopefully, the State can be helpful.

I understand you are seeking some assistance from the Board of Public Utilities. And, my understanding is that that's going very well. So, the electricity that they put into the grid, they can get the retail value of it -- that should hopefully help with the operation.

MR. BLAIR: We also think that-- When I talk about using the existing infrastructure in the State, we've been working for a long time to rebuild some infrastructure in the City of Trenton, and working on a public-private partnership to save the City of Trenton over \$2 million a year in operating expense. And, to renovate some of the assets at the City of Trenton that have been under-utilized and under-funded for a number of years. And, through this public-private partnership -- public because it's improving an asset of the city; it's infrastructure -- it's critical infrastructure to the City, certainly to the State, as well.

And, this is done with-- By putting a partnership together, you're able to bring dollars into these public infrastructure settings without taking the dollars and making those improvements -- without increasing the ratepayer's bill. Instead of jacking up your water bill or your sewer bill -- because that's what happens; we raise the money through a public fund and we charge that fee to the ratepayers. Well, that's-- It's not happening because we're protecting the ratepayer, so some of the infrastructure is falling apart. And, in a structure that we've created, we can bring that -- those improvements -- to the public infrastructure, not charge the ratepayer, but make the economics work based on the value of the energy, and the attributes of that energy that we can produce by bringing the technologies together. That makes sense.

SENATOR SMITH: It does.

We appreciate your contributions here today, Mr. Blair; thank you for coming in.

Our next witness -- Gary Sondermeyer from ANJR, which stands for the Association of New Jersey Recyclers. If you don't know ANJR, they

are a nonprofit, non-partisan network whose mission is to serve as the voice of recycling in New Jersey through education, advocacy, and the promotion of professional standards. ANJR firmly believes that New Jersey needs an integrated solid waste management plan, and will facilitate that plan with education and advocacy.

Gary Sondermeyer is -- he's now retired, right?

G A R Y S O N D E R M E Y E R: One hundred and thirty days and counting.

SENATOR SMITH: That you're retired?

MR. SONDERMEYER: Yes, sir. (laughter)

SENATOR SMITH: OK.

You used to work for Bayshore, which is one of our very innovative recycling solid waste facilities in the state. And, before that he was Deputy -- or an Assistant Commissioner--

MR. SONDERMEYER: I was Chief of Staff for 10 years at DEP.

SENATOR SMITH: Assistant?

MR. SONDERMEYER: I was Chief of Staff for 10 years, and I was an Assistant Commissioner for three.

SENATOR SMITH: OK, so, he's got a lot of good miles on him.

Take it away, Gary.

MR. SONDERMEYER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and Chairman Kennedy, and distinguished members of the panel.

It is always an honor to appear before you.

The Association of Recyclers became very focused on food waste in 2013, and for very good cause: Because it's the area of recycling where we have totally failed. Our characterization studies-- I mean, look at what's left

in the municipal garbage can; after 38 years of mandatory recycling, 20-25% of that is food. And, there's really a good reason for why we failed: Because we don't have enough places to bring the food waste. So, we worked very closely -- and, Senator Smith, you'll recall the Food Waste Recycling Act that the Legislature passed in 2020; became effective in 2021.

And, I actually came as a bearer of very good directional news today, which we have to have, because it's Earth Week. And, I wanted to focus-- There is a handout that we hopefully distributed to everybody, and I'm just going to walk through that very quickly; there's no need to look at it, I just wanted to mention it as a leave-behind.

But, the main issue, first, I wanted to -- we wanted to -- address was capacity. And, Senator Smith, you spoke about the two existing commercial facilities that are operating in the state. And, obviously, we just heard from Brian Blair at Trenton Renewables, Trenton Biogas -- terrific facility. Senator Smith, you mentioned the Waste Management CORE -- like apple core -- facility up in Elizabeth, which sends -- basically, they took an old garbage transfer station and brought in a big blender, which is called a macerator, and they blend food and, in liquid form, they pump it into the existing Rahway Valley Sewage (*sic*) Authority to maximize renewable natural gas generation. That's a really, I think, important model.

But, the news that I wanted to make sure all the Committee members were aware of -- we have the largest anaerobic digestion facility for food in the United States of America actively under construction in Linden, New Jersey. And, I think you -- of course, Chairman Kennedy, you were Mayor at the time in Rahway, a neighboring city -- you have to know the Tremley Point site really, really well; this is on Tremley Point. The capacity

of this project is 1,540 tons per day. I want to say that again: Existing capacity is about a thousand tons a day for food; this is 1,540 tons per day. It's a project from South Jersey Industries and RNG Energy. It is an anaerobic digestion facility. I had a chance, representing ANJR, to visit the site last week -- very, very impressive.

And, Chairman Smith, Chairman Kennedy, the sponsors of the project wanted to extend an invitation if at any time you want to see this facility. We don't have many opportunities like this. We have very large, new environmental infrastructure under construction. The target day for operation is about a year from now; end of the first quarter of 2026. We have another major project down in South Jersey, which is a company called Bioenergy DevCo, which has very successful anaerobic digestion food waste facilities in Maryland and elsewhere in the country. And, they have sited a 500-ton-a-day facility in Mantua Township, which is on the Rowan University campus. And, that project is included in the Gloucester County plan -- which is no simple task to get incorporated into a county plan. And, they are actively in permitting before the DEP.

So, the positive news point is that, in a year or two, we may have tripled our high-technology capacity to handle food waste. The law that you passed is working, and I think that's very, very important. Beyond that, we do have some small-scale in-vessel systems operating at community colleges -- Ramapo Community College in Bergen County; Merck has been a real leader in environmental management, and has a food waste digestion facility operating.

But, what we really need-- We have a desperate need for relief for small-scale facilities. So, we're being effective with large-scale projects.

Where we're failing is at the small scale. And, candidly, it's because the regulatory regime is so stringent, nobody can get approved. And, it's like the most basic -- pun intended -- low-hanging fruit of community gardens, composting. Composting at schools; getting back to municipal composting -- we have *no* municipal-level facilities. And, we need this. We need this. This is part of-- I grew up in downtown Paterson. I've toured seven community garden facilities in the City of Newark. These places are cultural resources, and we should be maximizing their use, including not only growing food for the community, but also composting what we have there. And, we've tried -- as you know, very well -- with legislation to get some relief, and we're not quite there.

I do want to focus a particular-- H el ene had mentioned S2426, which is that legislation that would involve the counties in planning. And, this is what's-- Now I'm switching a little bit to the food recovery end, or food waste reduction. We've never had institutional planning for food recovery in the State of New Jersey. That task is taken on by this phenomenal, phenomenal group of nonprofit organizations -- the food banks; the pantries; the kitchens. But, there's never been any institutional planning to maximize that.

So, as we know, solid waste was assigned to the counties to plan for 50 years ago. Then, in 1987, we had a second chapter -- which, of course, is recycling -- and, now this would represent a third chapter for food recovery planning. I could see--

SENATOR SMITH: Right, it's '24-'26. So, everybody that's here, get your cards and letters to Senator Paul Sarlo--

MR. SONDERMEYER: Yes--

SENATOR SMITH: --who chairs the Appropriations Committee, saying, “Senator Sarlo, we need this bill passed, and it means a lot.” Whatever you think it means, whatever your supporting testimony is, please send him a letter urging him to release it from committee.

MR. SONDERMEYER: Yes--

SENATOR SMITH: And, I’m going to ask Assemblyman Kennedy if he would run the bill on the Assembly side so that it’s out of one house already.

I mean, it’s way overdue, and I’ve got to believe that Speaker Coughlin *loved* the bill, all right.

So, if you would take it--

MR. SONDERMEYER: Sure--

SENATOR SMITH: --and run it through, it would be very helpful.

All right, sorry to interrupt.

MR. SONDERMEYER: I did just want to mention-- Certainly.

Thank you, and we will do that.

That same piece of legislation, we worked with the sponsors, and there was an added requirement, which is really, really important to get out what we need in the future to require DEP to develop a tiered regulatory system for compost facilities. That is what we desperately need. We really need it.

I want to move onto another element -- assuming that the counties will, at some point, have this responsibility to perform this *critically* important planning to connect the dots between the food generators and the banks and pantries. We worked through the New Jersey Climate Change

Alliance -- which I chaired for a number of years; Stockton University; and, Rutgers University, and we got a great grant from DEP under the Recycling Enhancement Act to develop what's called a Food Asset Recovery GIS Mapping Project. And, for the first time in the state's history, we have mapped the entire food system in New Jersey.

So, obviously, all the food banks -- and, there's only five or six designated banks -- but we have 843 food pantries, that, for the first time, we've mapped. And, 150 soup kitchens. And, then, there is a graphic on this page -- which I'm just going to allude to -- but what we also mapped is all the food and beverage manufacturers -- 2,000 of them; all the wholesalers; 6,000 supermarkets; 1,600 hotels; 110 casinos; 21,000 restaurants in New Jersey; 2,500 public schools; 700 parochial schools -- I could go on, and on, and on. The point is we've now mapped all of that information to hand to our 21 county planners so they can-- Basically, we wanted to try to do the homework to help the counties be able to connect the dots between all these food generators and the 843 -- mainly -- food pantries. So, we think this is a very important resource that is going to be available very, very soon through the DEP. And, DEP is going to own this database, and hopefully we begin to bring together the food recovery universe with the food waste world -- which is really what we need to do.

Just very quickly, in terms of pending legislation, thank you to the Committees for the Regional Food Waste Composting Bill that was passed at the end of 2023. Believe it or not, if a school developed in-vessel, or enclosed composting -- and, these things look like a glorified stainless steel photocopier; they are not a big piece of (indiscernible) infrastructure. But, if a school developed one of these-- And, I was Chairman of the Board for

Sustainable Jersey, and we actually purchased three of these for schools that put them in. But, another school can't use it. Another-- A school within a district can't work together to use that facility without it becoming a commercial composting facility. So, you developed legislation, that we thank you for, to take away those requirements from the (indiscernible) -- but it was conditionally vetoed, and these schools *still* would be required, if they want to bring in another school, an air permit. And, they're not going to do that. So, I think at some point in the future, we might want to come back to you and talk about whether that can be reformed.

Senator Smith, you mentioned S200 -- the date label legislation. ANJR has repeatedly been supportive of that legislation; we look forward to that moving.

Another important piece is S1040. I alluded to the community gardens issue -- community gardens need to be exempt from any DEP permitting. Again, growing up in Paterson, there's nobody to sign a permit application; there's no one there to do that; there's no funding to do something like that. We should be maximizing what community gardens do in growing crops, but also allow them to compost onsite. And, frankly, bring the compost material from the people who use the garden -- that's how it works elsewhere, like in the entire City of Philadelphia does this, and we should be evolving towards that.

And, Senator Smith, you also sponsored S203, which established additional targets of-- Our existing food recovery goal is to achieve a 50% food reduction by 2030. Your legislation pushes that envelope even further to 75%, and has DEP develop guidance for how we're going to get there. And, that's another important piece of legislation.

So, finally -- and, thank you for all this time; really appreciate it -- again, we desperately need a tiered regulatory system where we have exemptions for things like community gardens; the schools; backyard composting; streamlined county planning; and the use of tools that we've used for many, many years in other areas. General permits; registrations; permits by rule. If we don't make it simple to develop localized composting capacity, we are missing our greatest opportunity. Aside from the good news of these large facilities that are being developed, we would love to see DEP -- and, we've been advocates for this -- to be more aggressive. As you said, Senator Smith, that model between the CORE facility and Elizabeth, and at Rahway Valley Sewer (*sic*) Authority -- we have lots of sewer authorities in New Jersey. There's got to be other opportunities to do this; it makes so much sense. You don't have to build hundreds of millions of dollars of stand-alone facilities. You're maximizing existing, paid-for environmental infrastructure to maximize renewable natural gas generation from their digesters. So, we really would love that.

And, finally, waste reduction -- which, again, food waste reduction or donation -- I wanted to point out I had the honor of serving for two years as a Vice Chair of the Governor's Plastics Advisory Council. And, Senator Smith, you were wonderful working with us on all the issues that came up from that, including the build up of reusable bags in people's closets, everyone getting concerned about all of that. Well, we just published our second-year report in December, and we really focused this year on waste reduction. This is what we haven't done in the waste management field -- we have not been successful in reducing the amount of waste we produced in the first place. Pages 38-48 of this second-year report -- I think -- have some

really important vision and direction for what we can do to reduce not only plastics, but there's a real synergy -- like Skip the Stuff -- between food and plastics, where there's a lot of great stuff that we can do to make a difference.

So, thank you very much for all the time.

SENATOR SMITH: So, listen, could ANJR -- it's ANJR that did that report?

MR. SONDERMEYER: No, this is actually the Plastics Advisory Council, created--

SENATOR SMITH: All right, so--

MR. SONDERMEYER: --under the single-use plastics law.

SENATOR SMITH: Was it sent to every member of both--

MR. SONDERMEYER: So, I--

SENATOR SMITH: Was it sent to every member of the Legislature?

MR. SONDERMEYER: Absolutely. Absolutely.

SENATOR SMITH: OK, so, you already have it someplace in your emails. But, there's some really good bill ideas in that.

MR. SONDERMEYER: It's good stuff.

SENATOR SMITH: And, one of course, we would like -- if you're sending in cards and letters, there is -- Stop the Stuff?

MR. SONDERMEYER: Skip the Stuff.

SENATOR SMITH: Skip the Stuff. The easiest bill in the world, which just simply says that, unless a customer asks for the plasticware that's automatically put in every takeout, whether you want it or not, if they don't ask for it, it doesn't get put in. And, would encourage some restaurants to

actually go to hard silverware, because we just-- Like, every time you sell a takeout, you're killing the environment.

I don't know if you saw the recent research that they're finding *huge* quantities of microplastics in human brains. We've got to stop with the plastics already. So, maybe you can write a letter urging that that one go forward as well. That might be to Senator Scutari.

Anyway, thank you for your comments today.

Any questions for Mr. Sondermeyer?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN COLLAZOS-GILL: (indiscernible)

SENATOR SMITH: Sure; go ahead.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN COLLAZOS-GILL: Thank you.

Thank you so much for your information.

I really appreciate all the conversations that we're having; I really do appreciate this.

I am going to follow up with you with how we can improve compost. In Montclair, there's a lot of conversation about how can we improve this even at the State level. I know that Montclair does a pretty decent job, but it can be much, much better, and we can improve on that.

On the Skip the Stuff, I just want to say that Montclair introduced this again, and it's working fine. The original conversation about this was very lively, but now that it's fully implemented, you can see the benefits of that legislation at the very local level. So, I just wanted to say that it is working so it is worth moving it forward -- hopefully -- at the State.

Thank you.

MR. SONDERMEYER: Fantastic.

And, just to mention, I had a wonderful opportunity just yesterday to give an Earth Day presentation to the entire Watchung School in Montclair. And, they told me about just passing Skip the Stuff. Absolutely wonderful.

SENATOR SMITH: Thank you again.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HALL: I would like to just add--

SENATOR SMITH: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HALL: To add to that, I'm in Maplewood -- I represent Maplewood. So, you know how we are with our environmental. And, we started with the plastic bags and we did the Skip the Stuff, and it's working. And, every time that I go, and I pick up a takeout, and they ask me, "Oh, do you need utensils?" I know it's working.

So, thank you for that. And, we will be making strides.

I grew up in Montclair, too, so, we're kind of a team here--

MR. SONDERMEYER: Did you really, now? Amazing.
Amazing.

SENATOR SMITH: And, if I could do an advertisement for Maplewood--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HALL: Yes--

SENATOR SMITH: --one of your claims to fame is that you, Maplewood, were the first municipality in -- as far as we know, the world, but I can say comfortably in the United States -- to do composting--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HALL: Yes--

SENATOR SMITH: --municipal composting of your tree branches; your leaves; your whatever, whatever.

And, if you're a resident of Montclair, you can go -- at least formerly, it could be changed -- but you can go to the municipal yard and get your free tub of composting. And, as -- and, this is going on since the early 1900s, OK -- that's one of the reasons why Maplewood is one of the most beautiful towns in America. Because everybody gets their compost, and they put it in their yards, and they plant their flowers, and it's just a fabulous place.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HALL: And, it's at the recycling center, so you can do it all at once.

SENATOR SMITH: All in one shot.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HALL: Yes. (laughter)

So, thank you.

SENATOR SMITH: Absolutely, it's a great town.

So, we have two last witnesses on compost -- I think. Composting -- Christina PIO-CAS-TRO -- I'm not sure how to pronounce the second name, or the additional name. And, then, it was from Viviano (*sic*) Ecologics -- which is a food waste composting company.

And, Matt Wasserman, from the New Jersey Composting Council.

If you would both come up, that would be great.

And, we're going to hear the last word, which is compost.

And, we didn't miss anybody right? All of our witnesses that we asked to be here have been here?

OK. So, Dennis Toft, maybe you can introduce our first witness.

DENNIS TOFT, ESQ.: Thank you, Senator.

I am Dennis Toft from CSG Law.

I'm happy to introduce my client, Christina PioCosta-Lahue from Vivaria Ecologics.

We'll explain the problem we're having with DEP in being able to site large-scale composting facilities in New Jersey.

CHRISTINA P i o C O S T A - L A H U E: Thank you.

Chairman Smith, Chairman Kennedy, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. And, to all the members of both Committees.

The food waste recycling and Food Waste to Energy Production Law requires large food -- large food waste generators who generate an average projected volume of 52 tons per year of food waste -- or more -- to source, separate, and recycle that food waste. In order to fully meet the laws' ambitious food waste reduction goals, the State must dramatically increase capacity.

My company, Vivaria Ecologics, has been working to develop commercial food waste composting facilities since 2020. The development process has been slow and challenging due to the prohibitive regulatory environment, as well as the difficulties inherent in identifying suitable sites in a densely populated state such as New Jersey.

According to the recycling rules -- the DEP recycling rules -- Class C recycling facilities for food waste composting must operate in an enclosed structure. This requirement is not informed based on current compost science. It destroys the economics of compost facilities, and it creates a dangerous operating environment. New Jersey is the only state in the country with this rule, which is a critical barrier to the development of the composting industry.

We have briefed the DEP Sustainable Waste Management Team on our Outdoor Food Waste Composting Project development since early 2022 on multiple occasions. These meetings were in the context of submitting an application for plan inclusion to the Solid Waste Advisory Council in Warren County in September 2022. Following a protracted meeting process over the course of six months, SWAC voted against plan inclusion, and in the resolution they cited this permitting issue as one of the reasons.

In October 2023, with the assistance of Dennis Toft, we submitted a petition for rulemaking to the DEP to remove the enclosure requirement from the recycling rules. We obtained letters of support to bring New Jersey in line with national standards, from the U.S. Composting Council, the Association of New Jersey Recyclers, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, Regional Plan Association, and leading compost industry experts. The DEP denied the request in April 2024, noting that the Department plans to undertake a comprehensive review of composting rules, including stakeholder consultation.

In August 2024, the DEP held a stakeholder meeting on this topic about the potential rulemaking to allow Class C recycling centers to compost food waste outside of a full enclosure. We submitted written comments following that stakeholder meeting. Recently, we have communicated with the DEP Sustainable Waste Management Team about the next steps in this process. They've been gathering further information, and they expect to hold another stakeholder meeting over this coming summer. Given the current dynamics in our region of declining disposal capacity and increasing waste disposal, establishing infrastructure to support

recycling and diversion will deliver environmental benefits and cost savings, as well as buy time to plan for longer-term solutions. Siting composting facilities throughout New Jersey will provide economic development opportunities for host communities and direct environmental benefit by increasing food waste diversion and compost production in state.

Thank you.

SENATOR SMITH: Matt.

MATTHEW WASSERMAN: Honorable Chairpersons, Senators, Assembly persons, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Matt Wasserman, and I am the Vice President and Advocacy Chair for the New Jersey Composting Council. We represent over 50 organizations across the state -- composters; micro haulers; nonprofits; even municipalities; all working toward the same goal: expanding composting or organic recycling here in New Jersey.

I guess one of the benefits of going last and not knowing who is going to be before me is you probably heard most of this, so I'm going to skip around a little bit so as not to be overly redundant.

You've heard a bit about how much food waste here is landfilled here in the state, citing ReFED. And, one of the things ReFED doesn't tell you -- unless you go in and start playing with the numbers -- is if you actually look at the amount of food waste going to landfill the last five years, despite our Food Waste Reduction Act, the number has actually gone up by as much as, at times, 10%. So, not only haven't we gone down or met or -- or, even come close -- to reduce by 50% by 2030, we're actually going in the wrong direction.

Likewise, if you go to the EPA's or the DEP's site and look at our landfill space -- our existing landfill space -- you start crunching some of the numbers, it looks like about 40% of our existing landfill space is going to be gone in the next 10 years. You know, at our current -- at our current disposal rates -- this only means that the cost that all of our municipalities already pay for tipping fees are only going up, and only going to go up.

As you've heard from various other testimonies today, we need the ability to do something with that food waste. It's fine to say, "Hey, let's put a trash can out there so that we -- our food waste can go in this trash can instead of that trash can." But, there's nowhere for that food waste in that trash can to go. If you happen to be within 25 miles of Trenton Renewables, or maybe up by the CORE facility, *perhaps* it might go there. But, generally, at this point, it's not going anywhere; maybe it goes to a farm. We *need* the ability for that food waste to go somewhere else.

There are two places that have RD&D permits. One is Ag Choice up in North Jersey. So, they actually open windrows. So, here's a perfect example of what you've just heard about, how the science just does not bear out that composting has to and should be done indoors. Before taking on the role I have now, I ran Community FoodCycle, which was a composting facility in the town of Hopewell. I was literally a hundred yards from my neighbors who were just homes, and I was taking in 1-2 tons of food waste a day -- even butcher waste, which is just meat waste. I didn't have *one* complaint; four, five years, not one complaint. The science bears out the fact that you can do -- you can do open food waste composting safely; you can do it without attracting pests, vermin, and creating odors.

Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont -- they're all doing this. The science is there; there's no reason for New Jersey to be behind in this area.

In terms of policy actions, S1040 and A2102, with regard to community gardens -- they need to be reconciled. I believe the Assembly bill is the one that actually is the better example. As they get reconciled, we need funding; we need funding for composting infrastructure. So, there have been grants out there for AD, and, as you've heard before, AD is -- we need it all. There's too much food waste to say it should only be one solution. But, we need some-- We need some grants for composting as well, for local collection.

S2426 and A2090 you've heard about as well. Those are critically important. We need to support education partnerships so residents, businesses, know how and where to divert food scraps.

Last -- for the last two weeks, and for the next three weeks, I'll be doing 10 different webinars for various communities across the state. I'm actually speaking with Lana from Montclair Community Farms in a couple of weeks, so we're -- we're all over the state, and we have the municipalities who want to do this, they just haven't -- they have nowhere they can do -- they have nowhere to go with this stuff. We need to grow the market for compost.

New Jersey has a vision. I mean, the folks up here, we appreciate everything that you're trying to do, we just need the systems that work. So, let's turn our waste into wealth; burdens into opportunities; and the promise of our food waste law into meaningful results.

Thank you again for your leadership and your time today. I am happy to discuss any of these suggestions in further detail.

SENATOR SMITH: So, after listening to everybody, it seems like there's two things that are needed to dramatically increase food waste processing and composting. The one that's being discussed here is legislation directing the DEP to allow open composting for -- especially for the lower tiered.

And, by the way, your representation about there being no odors -- if there's the *tiniest* odor, you're going to see a lot of pushback. We've seen that before in some composting facilities, especially with grass clippings, which have turned into a nightmare.

But, I understand it. You turn over the piles; you reintroduce oxygen; it becomes a semi-aerobic process, correct? As opposed to an anaerobic process--

MS. PíoCOSTA-LAHUE: I mean, I can speak to the technology that I am planning to use, which is aerated--

SENATOR SMITH: Right--

MS. PíoCOSTA-LAHUE: Static piles, which is a--

SENATOR SMITH: --aerobic process--

MS. PíoCOSTA-LAHUE: --step up. It's still quite simple, but it's a step up from turned windrows, so you don't -- they're static, so you don't turn the piles. But, they are on-- There's aeration that is below the pile, so forced aeration system--

SENATOR SMITH: Right, and you're not having odor issues.

MS. PíoCOSTA-LAHUE: Right. The main reason that has gained popularity across the U.S. in the past decade or so is that it does -- (indiscernible) -- you can't ever say you can eliminate 100% the chance of odor, but it controls odor very effectively--

SENATOR SMITH: OK--

MS. PIOCOSTA-LAHUE: --in part because the composting process occurs more quickly due to the forced aeration. So, the piece of the composting process that can potentially produce odor is at the beginning, when the food scraps are fresh. And, so the faster it moves -- the process moves through that, the faster--

SENATOR SMITH: Less likely to--

MS. PIOCOSTA-LAHUE: --you eliminate the opportunity for it even to happen.

SENATOR SMITH: All right, so the gamechanger, though, would be all of the existing sewage treatment facilities to take food waste and process it in their anaerobic digester.

So, my question to Gary -- who is not at the front table, but Gary Sondermeyer -- is there any technical engineering reason why a sewage treatment authority would have a problem with this?

MR. SONDERMEYER: There-- My understanding, Senator, is it does depend on the type of system for the wastewater plant. And, what we've been urging DEP to do is to really, essentially, just bring in the major wastewater treatment plants to evaluate if they have technology like Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority that they can do this.

That's at least the beginning. So, in most cases, there's not a technological reason.

SENATOR SMITH: So let me put a little homework on your plate. How about going to the Association of New Jersey Environmental Authorities, which is the organization for all the water and wastewater plants in the state, ask for time on their agenda, and see if they would like,

cooperatively with you, to have this new source of organic waste to process and find out what their concerns are.

Because, I don't think we can just force it on the--

MR. SONDERMEYER: No--

SENATOR SMITH: --sewage treatment authorities.

I mean, it's a great idea, but I think there needs to be a little more groundwork. You know, what kind of plants can't take food waste; what kind can; are they interested in; what are the economic arrangements?

I believe that in the Elizabeth, Linden, Rahway Valley Sewage (*sic*) Treatment facility, I believe that they provide this waste, but I think they also get paid a little bit to take it. So, what economic relationships need to be needed?

On your plate, on ANJR's plate, and certainly if you guys want--

MR. SONDERMEYER: That's a great suggestion.

SENATOR SMITH: Yes, see what the realities are, and we'll see what we can do on a bill, OK?

MR. SONDERMEYER: Fantastic; thank you.

SENATOR SMITH: Any questions for our panel on compost?
(no response)

Well, I want you to know this is one of the dirtiest and filthiest hearings I've ever been a part of. Assemblyman Kennedy and I enjoy this stuff; I hope you do, too.

The only thing that might get better is a toxic and hazardous waste hearing. But, we have-- There's a lot of good ideas that they're sharing with us, and I hope you'll take a look at all the materials, and if you guys and gals want to be co-sponsors -- or sponsors -- of legislation, it takes a lot of

hard work, because you'd be surprised how many people are involved in solid waste. There's a lot of stakeholders.

But, we welcome your participation in legislation that's needed. And, you can tell a lot of legislation is needed.

Chairman, anything you want to add?

ASSEMBLYMAN KENNEDY: No, that's--

SENATOR SMITH: Anything any members want to throw on the table? (no response)

Happy Earth Day.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)