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# Issue Outline – Michigan Grass to Gas Legislation

## I. Issue

HB 5334 and SB 725, based on language in SB 864 of 2008, proposes removing the ban on landfilling yard waste materials from landfills who collect methane for energy production.

The Mid Michigan Waste Authority, which represents 35 communities in the Saginaw Valley region, is opposed to this proposal. MMWA is a leader in the state's solid waste management arena, and works with a variety of entities, including the Michgan Recycling Coalition, to support the solid waste and recycling industries.

MMWA urges legislators to rethink the Grass to Gas idea. To assist in your review of the matter, background information and our concerns follow.

## II. Background

- Purports to boost the state's alternative/renewable energy source industry
- Claims that significant energy can be gleaned from recovering additional methane landfill gas (LFG) generated by allowing yard waste materials back in Michigan landfills.
- Supporters note that, although landfill gas LFG increases greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, that improving efficiencies in the generation of such gas will overall decrease emissions.
    - Also contend that landfill management practices will improve as they enact better emissions controls.

## III. Opposing Viewpoint/Facts vs Fiction

Many county and regional solid waste entities oppose proposals to eliminate the ban on yard waste landfilling. This opposition is based on a variety of reasons, with scientific and economic data to support such objections.

**A. Proposal causes concerns on multiple levels:**

1. Not about energy production, but about increasing landfill company revenues
2. Minimal increase in MI energy production: 0.81% of annual generation
3. **Multiple negative impacts:**
    - Hit to another Michigan industry, composting industry
    - Job loss
    - Increase Michigan residents' disposal costs for material
    - Increase GHG emissions; better practices not yet in place
    - Accelerate landfill capacity depletion

**B. Step back in waste management progress in Michigan**
Simply landfilling the material is a step backward that kills jobs and creates an insignificant amount of energy, while being harmful to the environment at the same time.

## IV. Economic Impacts

**A. Profits to Landfills:** Various Michigan landfills have already invested in the methane-to-electricity technology.

Additional revenues from yard clipping tip fees would mean additional profits

**B. Costs to Citizens** - Michigan residents would pay more to landfill those yard waste materials than they were paying to have them composted.

1. **Saginaw Impacts** – Member municipalities in two counties would need to increase their solid waste assessments to cover the very same materials that had been 41% cheaper when diverted for composting
   - In the Saginaw area, a ton of yard waste is composted for around $16 per ton, and landfilling a ton of material costs $23.29.
   - Equates to an additional $7 per ton to dispose of these materials

## V. Job Creation / Composting Infrastructure

Legislation such as this will not only stymie the composting industry progress across the state, but will also impact our regional economy and the fragile budgets of two struggling municipalities as well.

**A. Michigan Arena** - Recycling, composting and other alternative technological applications for managing our waste resources have a great potential to create businesses and jobs in Michigan.

- Infrastructure already exists and is responsible for approximately 5,000 jobs in our state alone, and revenues in the tens of millions.

**B. Saginaw Picture** – In the greater Saginaw area alone, there are three composting facilities that generate sustainable revenues for several governmental entities and for a long-lived independent business.

## VI. Benefits of Composting

– There are a number of benefits, both environmental and financial, offered by Michigan's composting industry

- Composting industry creates more jobs than landfilling industry
- Reduces Irrigation needs
- Increases soil productivity and limits erosion
- Valuable soil amendment, decreasing fertilizer and pesticide use

## VII. Other Organic Feedstock Technologies

- A number of state-of-the-art and emerging technologies exist that can make better use of this organic feedstock.

- In-vessel composting
- Anaerobic digestion
- Biogasification
- Pyrolysis

These technologies result in environmentally sound energy generation and useful by-products, while creating high tech, sustainable jobs.

## VIII. Bottom Line

In an era of continually shrinking budgets and ever-increasing costs throughout the entire spectrum of conducting business and everyday life, decision makers representing Michigan constituents will be hard-pressed to stand behind a policy that provides for windfall profits for one industry, at the expense of other Michigan businesses, Michigan consumers, Michigan's environment and Michigan's future economic growth.

As the above ably demonstrates, there are better alternative energy methods that Michigan can support that could provide a win for all involved.

michiganrecyclingcoalition

## Yard Waste Ban Exemption

## POSITION STATEMENT

**The Michigan Recycling Coalition asks legislators to oppose exemptions to the Yard Waste Ban. Do not turn back the clock and provide exemptions to the Yard Waste Ban for landfills on assurances that they will capture gases for energy production.**

Landfills are engineered to exacting and expensive specifications to control toxic releases resulting from the disposal of municipal solid waste (MSW). Such expensive controls are *overkill* for the disposal of yard waste. Putting yard waste back into the landfill at higher cost and little benefit to governments, businesses, and citizens to try and capture energy, the amount of which is open to debate, is short-sighted.

Banning yard waste from landfills has reduced the production of anaerobic greenhouse gases, provides a livelihood for many Michigan citizens, and makes widely available a natural and an important amendment to improve soil fertility. The composting industry is a young and growing industry and investments in the industry occur daily. Michigan composters would benefit from state-level market support rather than the potential crippling of their ability to obtain feedstock resulting from the redirection of yard waste back to landfills. **The trade off to produce a debatable amount of Michigan's energy is just not worth undoing more than 15 years of investment in developing a better, more cost effective way to manage our organic resources.**

Landfill gas is a *waste* product of landfill disposal. **Why make more waste just because the technology to manage it exists?** While it *is* important to capture landfill gas generated from MSW for which there is no other utilization option, a better option does exist for yard waste; composting.

The addition of yard waste to our MSW burden will accelerate the filling up our landfills requiring us to site more in a nearer future. If we are serious about generating energy from yard waste and biomass, we will invest in up-to-date technology, such as in-vessel anerobic digesters, whose express purpose is to efficiently capture methane for energy use and still provide a useful soil amendment end product.

The State of Michigan enacted legislation banning the disposal of yard waste from disposal in landfills in 1990, phased in over five years. *The Ban was a proactive solution.* There are numerous problems with the concept of putting yard waste back into Michigan landfills under any form:

- Landfill gas is an insignificant source of energy and introducing yard clippings into Michigan's landfills will not have an appreciable impact on energy production.
- Landfills designed to capture methane are inefficient and still emit considerable amounts of methane (which is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide). As such, the proposal would have a net negative impact on the environment.
- Landfill gas is a poor performing and dirty source of energy.
- It will have a detrimental impact on Michigan's fledgling composting industry, resulting in a net loss of jobs in Michigan.
- It runs counter to sophisticated waste management trends throughout the country and the world, placing Michigan at a competitive disadvantage with regard to the development and implementation of state-of-the-art and emerging recycling technologies.
- It will accelerate the depletion of existing landfill space in Michigan, causing an increase in disposal costs for Michigan's businesses, cities, and residents.

Source: Michael J. Csapo, AICP and J.D. Lindeberg, P.E., 2008. Unpublished paper, The Argument Against Senate Bill 864. Oakland, MI.

**The Michigan Recycling Coalition Board of Directors, Composting Council, and members urge you to oppose exemptions to the Yard Waste Ban.**

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