

## Composting Technology Centre

2010 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of composting in Canada. The Olds College Compost Technology Centre has dedicated research and education towards the recognition of compost as a viable and environmentally sustainable resource.

“Compost is an important natural resource and this project is no longer viewed as merely an effort to divert waste from the landfill,” said Shirley Lupino, Coordinator of the Composting Centre. “Composting is an important part of a healthy food cycle. As we recover the organic matter from fruits, vegetables and plants through composting, it produces linkages all along a healthy food line. Not only are we saving landfill space and money, we are conserving valuable organic matter and nutrients which we can return to enrich the earth.”

The Olds College Centre for Innovation’s Composting Technology Centre partnered with the Town of Olds in 1995 to start one of the first centralized composting systems in Alberta. This initiative saw homeowners responsible for the source separation of organics from the main waste stream. The compost product was widely accepted as a valued natural resource. The Mountain View Regional Waste Commission expanded the program with the inclusion of the Town of Sundre (2002) and the Town of Didsbury (2003).

“The role of the Mountain View Regional Waste Commission is vital, because without the infrastructure of the green bins this large-scale program wouldn’t be workable,” said Lupino.

The three towns involved with the Mountain View Regional Waste Commission provide a green compost bin for all residents. The residential bins, along with community grass bins, are collected every two weeks and delivered by the Commission to the Composting Technology Centre on the Olds College campus. Three area schools are also involved in compost collection programs: Westglen School in Didsbury, Deer Meadow School in Olds and River Valley School in Sundre, which are all part of Chinook’s Edge School Division. The green bin collection at the schools is scheduled on the same day as each community’s residential pick-up, so no extra collection is required.

“We started at the middle-grade schools, because students in Grades 5, 6, and 7 are very willing to try new things and the study of the environmental impact is included in the Science curriculum. I think it is important to involve kids so that composting becomes a habit that will be carried on through adulthood,” said Lupino. “They are also very interested in the scientific aspect of the process and like to get involved in the demonstrations we make at the schools.”

Composting is the decomposition of organic matter into a soil-like amendment which acts like a fertilizer. It typically takes six months to process the organic matter into compost. The Olds College Centre for Innovation’s Composting Centre then distributes the compost throughout the year, although 80 percent of the compost is sold in the first two weeks of May as homeowners begin the gardening season.

The Compost Centre has been contracted for an array of industrial and agricultural projects. Clients are looking for an environmentally sustainable solution for organic residuals created in their businesses activities. Composting not only creates a product safe to re-enter the environment but also an additional profit from sales.