

Students Learn Lessons Using Corn Products

FROST VALLEY, N.Y. — Products that look and perform like plastic but biodegrade like leaves and wood chips have taught elementary and junior high school students a unique lesson in resource recovery at the Frost Valley YMCA in the heart of New York's Catskill Mountains.

The Frost Valley facility, which since 1990 has been composting 120 tons of food scraps generated from 28,000 visitors annually, is the largest residential environmental center in the United States.

Now, in the first full-scale program in North America, more than 5,000 students from New York and New Jersey have used, collected, and helped compost disposable cutlery to demonstrate the value of foodservice products made from biodegradable materials such as corn.

Novon Products Group, a division of Warner-Lambert Company, manufactures and markets Novon® polymers, which are based in part on cornstarch and other completely biodegradable materials. Novon polymers perform like plastic but biodegrade completely in biologically active environments, such as in community composts.

Forks, knives, and spoons made of Novon polymers were purchased for use in more than 50,000 meals served from May 24 through the fall as part of Frost Valley's world-renowned environmental education program.

Finished compost which originated from food scraps, yard trimmings and Novon polymers will be used in the Frost Valley greenhouse to grow fruits and vegetables for meals in the cafeteria. When Chris Olsen, a sixth-grade student from Huntington, N.Y., saw compost being used to grow fruits and vegetables, he reported, "The cutlery becomes part of a cycle where you don't waste anything."

"As one of the first full-scale composters of food waste in North America, we were eager to incorporate cutlery made of Novon polymer into our resource recovery program," said Halbe Brown, Frost Valley YMCA executive director. "It provides our students with what is literally hands-on environmental participation, while validating the important role that a new generation of biodegradable materials can play in reducing our nation's solid waste."

The students' enthusiasm supports the director's belief that the children have a high degree of environmental consciousness that is refined at Frost Valley and then taken home. Sixth-grade student Meghan Gifford, also from Huntington, N.Y., said of the cutlery, "It feels good to know I'm helping the environment by using biodegradable (cutlery). We should not use plastic forks or spoons or knives."

"We are replacing the plastic cutlery we use for all off-site meals, including picnics and

barbecues, with Novon-based cutlery. This change will further reduce the solid waste we generate," said Foodservice Manager Chris Marshalek.

Waste-reduction efforts spell big savings at Frost Valley. "Our reduction, reuse and recycling practices have taken 120 tons out of the waste stream and saved us over \$10,000 each year in disposal fees," said Mike Larison, director of buildings and grounds. "The use of Novon polymers takes us one step further. They become part of a valuable product. Here in the Catskills, where soils are poor, the compost is like gold."

Achieving "zero-waste" is an objective that can be



CORN TALK NEWS

PENNSYLVANIA MASTER CORN GROWERS ASSOC., INC.

approached through the use of biodegradable polymers in many foodservice operations, according to John Sherwin, manager of product positioning at Novon Products. "The beauty of the Frost Valley program," he said, "is that we have elementary and junior high school children demonstrating how readily one can incorporate biodegradable foodservice products like this cutlery into a composting operation."

The same efforts can be implemented in institutional

foodservice operations and quick service restaurants, where food and soiled paper products already comprise up to 80 percent of the front-of-the-counter waste stream, according to Sherwin.

"Simply by replacing the plastic disposables presently in use, which contaminate the rest of the waste stream and make it unsuitable for composting, restaurants can divert all of this material and return it to the soil, where it becomes a beneficial supplement."

Delmarva Corn, Soybean Conference Set

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Soil compaction and acidity, groundwater quality and weed control — these topics will be program highlights for the 1994 Delmarva Corn and Soybean Conference, the largest wintertime agricultural exposition on the Delmarva peninsula.

Now in its 14th year, the annual daylong educational event is scheduled Feb. 16 in the Wicomico Youth and Civic Center at Salisbury — on Maryland's lower Eastern Shore. Sponsors include agribusiness organizations, along with the Cooperative Extension Service at land-grant universities in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia.

Rounding out the day's

program will be presentations on "Managing Crops on Droughty Soils" and "Marketing Strategy of Market Toppers."

All relate to the conference theme, "Farming in Today's Environment," according to Paul L. Gunther, agricultural science agent in Queen Anne's County for the Cooperative Extension Service, University of Maryland at College Park.

Gunther again heads the planning committee for the Delmarva Corn and Soybean Conference. He notes that the 1993 conference was cancelled because avian influenza was threatening the area's \$1.25 billion poultry industry last February.

Avian influenza has not

been detected so far this fall or winter in commercial broiler flocks on the Delmarva peninsula. But any cancellation plans for the 1994 conference will be made in accordance with a document recently developed by extension and state department of agriculture poultry health specialists and approved by the Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc. This document is titled "Avian Influenza/Emergency Poultry Diseases: Guidelines for Scheduling and Holding Meetings on Delmarva."

Activities at the Feb. 16 event will get under way at 8:30 a.m. with free coffee — and fresh soybean doughnuts prepared by the Maryland Soybean Board.

Commercial exhibits and educational displays also will be open for visiting. Exhibit visitors will be eligible to qualify for door prize drawings. Two Delmarva Corn and Soybean Conference scholarship awards will be presented prior to the noon break.

Admission to the conference is free. Each person arriving before 10 a.m. may pick up a free ticket that allows a \$2 discount for the \$5 noon lunch. No advance ticket purchase is required, as was the case in previous years.

The Wicomico Youth and Civic Center is located behind the Salisbury Mall, off U.S. Highway 50, in southeast Salisbury. Plenty of free parking is available.

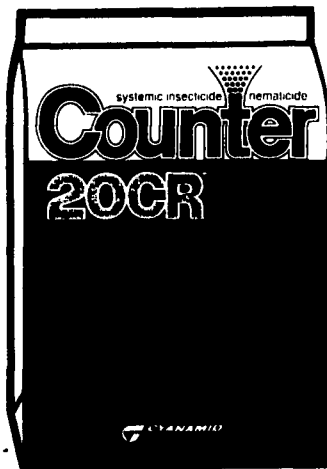
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