**Student Composting**

Elkader, Iowa, a town of 1200 located 100 miles north of Iowa City, was the winner of a [2016 Iowa Environmental Excellence Award](https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/DNR-News-Releases/ArticleID/829/Governors-Environmental-Excellence-Award-Winners-Announced) from the governor's office for its innovative composting.

The Central Community School in Elkader began composting food waste after community members approached Ann Gritzner, a teacher at the school.

In 2014, Gritzner had her global science class research how to organize such a program. The school first had students after lunch dump their food scraps onto a tarp, so they could see the amount of waste from one lunchtime. Once they located a site for the compost pile, composting lunch waste began and continues each school day.

In the lunchroom, students line up to put their food scraps into special bins. Adults are present to help the youngest, including the  3-year-old preschoolers. The food waste collected each day from the more than 400 students fills half of a 55-gallon bin.

Gritzner says, "The kids have learned very quickly, 'If I don't take things I don't want to eat, then my tray is empty and I can bypass the compost line.' So, we have dramatically reduced food waste, just as a byproduct of the composting program.”

Volunteer high school students haul the food waste to a van and drive the waste to a manure spreader donated by local farmers. This year, the students modified the manure spreader so it would spew the food waste more effectively on top of the compost pile.

The food waste composting program is supported by Elkader’s rural community. Farmers continually add corn stalks to the compost pile. And students raised money using a GoFundMe online account to buy the materials needed to build a shed for the manure spreader.

The manure spreader is stinky, Gritzner admits. "But you know what? Sometimes life is messy.”

An edited version of an article by Cleo Krejci, “'Small school in Iowa models how to set up a compost site,”*Iowa City Press Citizen*, July 25, 2022, <https://www.press-citizen.com/story/news/2022/07/25/iowa-20-waste-made-food-why-isnt-being-composted-iowa-city-landfill-recycling/10028926002/>.