



*People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance*

## **National Wildlife Federation**

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**Alfred State College  
Alfred, New York  
Spring 2002, Composting**

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Campus Profile**

This project is unique in that it involves two campuses working jointly: Alfred University and Alfred State College. Both colleges are situated in the rural, western New York village of Alfred in Allegany County.

Alfred University is small, selective, private university approximately 70 miles due south of Rochester, New York, situated on a hilly 232-acre campus. A small religious sect called the Seventh Day Baptists founded Alfred University. The socially progressive ideals of the founders impacted the university. Alfred was the second university in the nation to admit women, and the first to have women and men in the same courses of study. There are about 2000 undergraduate students and 300 graduates' students at AU, with 164 full-time faculty. At the University, teaching is the primary faculty emphasis. Alfred is world renowned for two particularly strong areas of study. US News and World Reports ranked its Masters in Fine Arts Ceramics #1 in the nation and Alfred also produces internationally sought after Ceramic Engineers.

Alfred State College is situated on the opposite side of the valley from Alfred University. Alfred State is a member of the SUNY (State Universities of New York) school system. They are approximately 3,000 students and over 140 faculty members. Alfred State offers state-of-the-art technical degrees. The campus features a 750-acre working farm, a horticulture complex, CAD laboratories, a Computer Integrated Manufacturing Center and a satellite campus for Culinary Arts as well as Automotive technology.

#### **Group/Class Profile**

The Alfred University/Alfred State College Communal Dining Hall Composting Project was primarily linked with the Alfred University Honors program. Honors students at Alfred University are expected to complete a Senior Thesis Project before they graduate. Dining hall composting became the goal for the completion of my Honors Thesis Project. Students are expected to create their own work, be it a written research thesis or a project. In the past Honors students have choreographed dances, written plays, composed music and of course written very long original research papers. Along the way several campus groups became vital to the project. Groups lending advice and support included the Alfred University Environmental House, the ENS division of Alfred University, Alfred State's Life Sciences Division, the Alfred State Farm and the Alfred University Center for Energy and Environmental Research (CEER).

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## **GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **Short-Term Goals**

The short-term goal was to make composting institutionalized at Alfred University and Alfred State College. For this project to be successful and a valuable environmental measure required unprecedented cooperation between the two schools. Perhaps most importantly this project needed to be an academic experience. This required several short-term yet critical steps, including contact administrators and staff from both campuses and "pitch" the idea, especially to Dining Services staff. With their support a specific plan was developed. A physical site needed to be found and excavated in order accommodates composting. But what method would work best at Alfred? More research was needed. With the tools, equipment, support and know-how secured, composting is becoming a lasting part of the Alfred community and can be measured by the quantifiable targets set out at the project's inception (build a compost site, write a curriculum engaging the classroom with the compost and get all of the critical people supporting the project).



### **Long -Term Goals**

Over the next two to three years there are many things that should occur for the project to continue being successful.

I hope the village of Alfred will take advantage of the Compost Project. Municipal leaf collection should be added to the compost. Villagers could freely use the compost for their own lawns and gardens. The college's physical plant crews could use the compost on gardens and while landscaping.

Higher student involvement is another goal. When the course becomes available to students, they need to enroll. It is very simple, the more students interested in the academic and scientific value of learning about composting, the better off the project will be. Environmental clubs and organizations should take a managerial role in the composting project.

Additionally, the Alfred State Farm should take advantage of the compost. When the compost is mature and when there is any extra volume the farm hands will be spreading the compost

on the fields. Compost is a wonderful organic soil additive that can increase crop yield naturally.

Finally, I hope that Alfred Almond Central School (the local K-12 public school) will visit the Alfred State Farm. Children should learn where food and milk come from. They could learn about the basics of compost as well as the fundamentals of agriculture.

### **Accomplishments**

So far everything is going well and according to plan. However, the compost project has not reached its defining moment, the day dining-hall waste first starts to heap. Nothing is guaranteed or really accomplished until that happens. But the site is under construction and nearing completion, the project is within budget, the course curriculum for Alfred State and Alfred University is written and submitted, a pick-up truck has been donated, and the response from all involved is positive. Universities have unique schedules. They have fiscal and academic years that are much different than the calendar year, as they are different from each other. There are large blocks of time when the dorms are either packed to capacity with 20-somethings or virtual ghost towns between semesters. The accomplishments of this project cannot be truly known until late August when the construction is complete, the food waste stream has resumed flowing and students and faculty begins studying about compost. All I can do is continue to make sure everything is in place for the project to be successful.

### **Challenges and Responses**

Funding has been a major challenge. Whenever I was confronted with a large ticket item that would break the budget, I searched different avenues. Our compost site was actually supposed to be the foundation for a barn. When the barn project fell through I already had 60% of the excavation complete. When it came time to clear and level land I avoided having to pay an outside contractor by making a personal appeal to Roy Doane, Alfred State's Director of Physical Plant. His crew and excavator will be finishing the construction. When I needed a pick-up truck, I spread the word and a faculty member was willing to donate a vehicle. It seems that whenever funding became a roadblock the right people were found. People are willing to help; you just need to find them. When you do, be direct, courteous and flexible. For example, I needed a sizable tract of land to situate eight compost heaps. In exchange for the land, we will be adding sawdust bedding used in dairy calf pens to our compost. The farm needed a better way of disposing of the bedding and I needed some more "Browns" to add to the compost mixture. By being direct, courteous and flexible, we both benefit.

The other challenge became apparent while I was writing course curricula. I had no idea what I was doing. This took extra time. The very particular format and specifications needed by curriculum approval boards was time consuming. These boards are comprised of faculty members, usually appointed by the Faculty Senate, and they meet very infrequently. This required extra patience. I still do not know the outcome of the course approval process. The course, once approved, will be added to the course offering at least one semester later than I originally anticipated. Better late than never definitely applies.

## **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

There were several individuals who contributed extra times and support to this project.

Dr. Michele Hluchy, Professor of Environmental Studies at Alfred University

Dr. Diana Sinton, Professor of Environmental Studies at Alfred University

Dr. Christopher Sinton, Director of the Center for Environmental and Energy Research

Colin McCarthy, Manager of the Alfred State Farm

Dr. Jonathan Buckwalter, Professor of Life Sciences at Alfred State College

John Dietrich, Manager for Powell Center Dining Hall

### **Funding and Staffing**

The project will cost under \$2000 in materials. The largest expenses were for crushed stone (\$550), a tool shed (\$450), and the hand tools (\$250). Many expenses were avoided because land did not have to be purchased, excavation was completed in-house, the pick-up truck was donated etc. The funding came in large part from the National Wildlife Federation Campus Ecology Grant. Alfred University's CEER contributed several hundred dollars. Future cost savings are expected when Alfred University and Alfred State College negotiate their solid waste disposal contract.

### **Policies**

There have been no policies adopted in conjunction with this project. However, there was a certain policy in place that aided the project. Students will need to sign for a vehicle in order to collect the compost from both campuses' dining halls. Alfred University will host the vehicle as a part of its motorpool. But in order for Alfred State College students to be covered by the university's insurance they need to be registered students at Alfred University. Luckily Alfred University and Alfred State College have enjoyed cross-registration for many courses. The composting course will be such a course, thus allowing both types of students to access the motorpool.

### **National Wildlife's Campus Ecology Program**

The NWF's Campus Ecology Program was instrumental for the success of this project. The information available on-line and in the resource packets was useful. Most important were the networking opportunities between the other fellows and myself. By sharing information with other fellows, helpful hints and Solutions to common challenges were exchanged. The website was a very quick way to obtain information. The following resources were used:

-Fellowship Grants

-Online case studies and *Campus Environmental Yearbook*

-*Ecodemia*

## **OUTREACH, EDUCATION AND PRESS**

This project was very closely tied to the academic mission of Alfred University and Alfred State College. From the very beginning this project had education as part of its core intent. I hope that for years to come students will study and learn about composting in the classroom. I used information tables in the dining halls, e-mail and short commercials on the AUTV network.

The press provided some other outlets for information disbursement. Radio public service announcements ran on 89.7 FM, WALF. This radio serves not only Alfred University and Alfred State College but also the Village of Alfred. There were newspaper articles in the *Hearthstone Town and Country*. The compost project was featured on the Alfred University E-news, an electronic newsletter sent to all current students, faculty and staff as well as alumni and friends of the University. In the upcoming summer alumni magazine the compost project will be a featured article. Alfred's CEER has even posted information on its homepage at <http://ceer.Alfred.edu>.

### **REVIEW AND REPORTING**

This project will become a permanent part of the Alfred University Library Archives. In August, when the project is complete there will be a full-color published honors thesis, which is kept in the special collection section of the Library for public display. Every year faculty will reassess the successes and areas for improvement for the compost project. Each student involved in the compost course will keep a journal during the semester. The journal will track vital measurements like moisture content of the compost.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

When you try to push environmental measures remember, "Be direct, courteous and flexible." A small win is better than no win at all. I feel as if people of my generation must learn the value of environmental sustainability. Green initiatives are fundamentally correct and rather simple things for any organization to undertake.