



Charlotte.com
The Charlotte Observer

C
6
F

Dale Jarrett 

"THE UNDISPUTED PRICE LEADER..."



FOR BEST SELECTION AND THE ABSOLUTE BEST PRICE

EMPLOYEE PURCHASE ONLY AT DALE

Purchase your car at the price you worked for

Jobs
Cars
Real Estate
Apartments
Shop Local
All Classifieds
• Create an Ad
• Find an Ad
Legal Notices

News

Opinion

Blogs/Columnists

Kevin Siers

Business

Sports

Entertainment

Living

Local News

Multimedia

Blogs

ONLINE EXTRAS

Today's Paper

Archives

Weather

Forums

Traffic Reports

Newcomers Guide

Ads From Observer

Advertising Sections

Local Coupons

Celebrations

Yellow Pages

Maps & Directions

SITE SERVICES

Site Index

RSS

Place an Ad

Contact Us

Contact Observer

Feedback

E-Edition

Staff Listing

[Home](#) > [Opinion](#) > [Viewpoint](#)

Posted on Fri, Apr. 27, 2007

[email](#) [print](#) [reprint or license](#)

[AIM](#) [del.icio.us](#) [Digg it](#)

Leftovers are not for landfills

N.C. lawmakers should ban trashing food, promote recycling

JONATHAN BLOOM
Special to the Observer

North Carolinians throw away enough food in a year to fill Charlotte Bobcats Arena. The General Assembly should slow this squandering by outlawing food from the regular waste stream. That step would encourage innovation and fresh thinking on trash, while minimizing the need for new dumps.

As the legislature considers future landfills in North Carolina, it's a good time to consider food in the waste stream. In August, legislators placed a year-long moratorium on building new landfills. They're now weighing whether to approve six proposed sites that would make ours a net trash importing state.

As it deliberates the issue, the legislature should know that we annually throw away millions of tons of recyclables or compostables that could grow our economy instead of garbage mounds.

For inspiration on how this would work, the General Assembly can look to its own lunchroom. The Legislative Building's cafeteria has sent edible leftovers to homeless shelters since 2001 and will soon begin composting its inedible food.

Environment, economics

In particular, food is an appetizing target, as it comprises about 12 percent of landfill materials. Because organics are the second biggest portion of the waste stream, diverting food from dumps will save the state money by cutting disposal amounts and costs, increasing landfills' life spans and producing rich soil from composting. Equally important, eliminating organics from landfills would aid the environment. Landfills are America's largest source of methane emissions and organic materials are the second biggest component of landfills. When organic materials break down in landfills, they release methane, a greenhouse gas 21 times more damaging than carbon dioxide.

By contrast, "Composting, if done properly, does not emit methane," said Craig Coker, principal of Coker Composting and Consulting and a former composting specialist at the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. "It's also carbon neutral."

We're now realizing just a pinch of the potential economic and environmental benefits, as only 6 percent of North Carolina's food waste is diverted from landfills. Heeding the EPA Food Waste Recovery Hierarchy, we should:

- Waste less food. Reducing the volume of food thrown away automatically lowers the amount in landfills.
- Donate edible food to needy people.

Groups like the Community Food Rescue will pick up excess food from supermarkets and

restaurants, while its parent agency, Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina, both collects and receives edible donations. The Society of St. Andrew organizes volunteer gleaning events at farms to pick unharvested crops. Donors are protected by federal and state liability laws, save money on their waste bill and receive tax benefits.

- Feed animals. Bulk donations to livestock farms allows food to be used.
- Compost. Huntersville's Wallace Farm already converts thousands of tons of food waste into useful soil each year and has capacity to take much more.

Massachusetts has proposed barring organics from landfills by 2010. There's no reason North Carolina can't do the same. Setting a future date for such a ban would prod businesses, municipalities and individuals into action. It would encourage composting and other alternatives like waste-eating worms and anaerobic digestion.

By enacting such a ban, the General Assembly would encourage progressive thinking and green technology instead of the unsustainable practice of filling holes with trash.

"You'd not only increase the life of landfills, but create jobs by making a positive impact on an up-and-coming industry," said Kerry Krumsiek, executive director of the Carolina Recycling Association.

No dumping ground

North Carolina is ready to prevent food from reaching dumps. "If you were able to ban food waste from landfills across the state right now, we have the composting infrastructure to handle that load," said Krumsiek, who also oversees the Carolina Composting Council.

Should it decide against outlawing food from landfills, the General Assembly can still facilitate composting and other green alternatives. It could establish tax credits for businesses that divert inedible food waste or pass a tipping fee surcharge to increase the cost of regular disposal.

Our state faces an important decision: We can become an environmental leader or a dumping ground. If a healthy economy and environment is the ultimate aim, we should set high goals for diverting food from landfills instead of creating more dumping space.

We've made great strides with other forms of recycling and even banned yard waste from landfills in 1993. Now it's time North Carolinians applied that same resolve to a meatier target -- food waste in our trash.

Jonathan Bloom is a journalist in Chapel Hill writing a book on wasted food in America. He is a member of the NC Food Diversion Task Force, and he also maintains the Web site <http://www.wastedfood.com/>.



Jobs

Cars

Real Estate

Apartments

Shop Local

All Classifieds

- Create an Ad
- Find an Ad

Legal Notices

News

Opinion

Blogs/Columnists

Kevin Siers

Business

Sports

Entertainment

Living

Local News

Multimedia

Blogs

ONLINE EXTRAS

Today's Paper

Archives

Weather

Forums

Traffic Reports

Newcomers Guide

Ads From Observer

Advertising Sections

Local Coupons

Celebrations

Yellow Pages

Maps & Directions

SITE SERVICES

Site Index

RSS

Place an Ad

Contact Us

Contact Observer

Feedback

E-Edition

Staff Listing