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Good morning. My name is Cliff Walkington. I am the General Manager of Hammond Farms, based here in the Lansing area. We are a state registered commercial compost facility, a food scrap hauler and a four location landscape supply business, specializing in the production of custom soil blends and mulches. We process about 50,000 cy of yard trimmings and organics a year, including a good portion of the curbside yard waste generated by City of Lansing residents. We haul and compost almost 15,000 cy of food scraps for our customers across southern lower Michigan and have recently invested over two million dollars in specialty equipment to expand our composting business. This investment demonstrates a commitment to this industry as well as our belief that there is a future in composting!

I'm going to expand on a couple of things that Bill mentioned, beginning with what compost does. While compost absolutely provides nutrients for plants, I believe its primary function is as a soil amendment. It improves the soil's ability to manage moisture. It loosens compacted soils and allows the soil to hold and releases nutrients slowly and it adds valuable organic matter. In short, it makes the soil healthy. And people are beginning to understand its benefits, which is why most of us compost producers in Michigan sell everything we make. We have a waiting list for our product at Hammond Farms right now!

Bill talked a little about what materials can be composted. Leaves, grass clippings and ground brush immediately come to mind, but in recent years, food scraps, paper products and compostable products like these <flatware, plates and cup> have been created. All of these are plant based and will break down completely in a commercial composting facility. Think of how much material cafeterias and food courts could divert from the waste stream with these products!

What is commercial composting? The process is pretty fascinating really. Once material is ground <picture> and the specific recipe is mixed the material is placed in windrows <picture> where it is turned <picture> until it is composted. Naturally occurring temperatures in these windrows range from 140 to 160 degrees, killing weed seeds and pathogens. Once the material has stopped heating, it is screened, allowed to cure and then can be used. <Samples>

So who uses this stuff? Aside from backyard gardeners, landscape contractors use it in topsoil blends for lawns and plant beds, turf specialists use it when maintaining and rejuvenating ball fields and golf courses and growers use it in their soil blends...the flowers in front of you were grown from seed in a compost blend. Rain garden and bio swale mixes, which retain and filter stormwater are being required in many new developments and feature compost as well. One of the largest single consumers of compost in Michigan is Scott's, who purchase, blend and bag tens of thousands of tons of compost every year. All of the users I have mentioned are helping to recycle and reuse material that used to be considered waste.

What does the future of composting hold? We believe that as long as composting organics is encouraged by policy makers, there will continue to be tremendous growth in our industry. We believe that there are still substantial volumes of organics that for one reason or another are not presently being composted. There is no shortage of demand for good compost now and many markets (like agriculture) are still under developed. We think this adds up to a bright future in composting.

Thank you for your time.