

# The Green Page



## The Jewish Food Festival's Green Initiative

*Two devoted volunteers organize to keep festival waste out of the landfill*

By Skyler Lewis

Donna Shore first became involved with the Jewish Food Festival (JFF) doing public relations work, after years of attending the event as a guest and a member of Carmel Valley's Congregation Beth Israel. She noticed the massive amounts of food scraps and other trash going to the landfills after the event — more than leaves the synagogue over the entire rest of the year combined.

"I knew we could do better and I knew we had a responsibility," explained Shore, referring to the Jewish value of *tikkun olam* ("repairing the world" in Hebrew), a shared responsibility for the welfare of the world. Her personal interpretation: environmental conservation, and specifically waste diversion.



Laura Arnow (left) and Donna Shore sort through the food waste bins after the festival last year.

With this goal in mind, Shore started what is now the JFF's Green Initiative, a volunteer effort that now diverts about 90 percent of the JFF's waste from the landfill, through a combination of diligently recycling all bottles, cans, and cardboard, and composting plates, napkins, utensils, and leftover food.

Laura Arnow joined as Shore's partner in the second year. Today, momentum on Green Initiative continues to increase as it enters its fourth year. The JFF board of directors has always been supportive, but this year "they're excited," said Shore — "...and they have ideas too," said Arnow.

During the festival, volunteers monitor the three color-coded bins (recycle, compost, and landfill), helping guests decide where to throw their scraps. Behind the booths, vendors learn to sort through their own scraps.

According to Shore and Arnow, the latke booth has caught on to this concept especially well. For three years in a row they have received the JFF's "Green Bagel Award" for correctly sorting their egg crates, flour bags, potato peelings, and frying oil into the right bins.

At the end of the day, Shore and Arnow sort through the compost bins to make sure everything is compostable, pulling out the errant plastic scrap — an arduous task that they hope will not be as necessary in the future.

Over the years, they have refined the process by finding alternatives to the most problematic items, like the ziplock bags used to hold people's food tokens. For other items, like the vendors' latex gloves that cannot be recycled, it's just a matter of training people to put them in the right bin.

They have even begun using compostable eating utensils, made from vegetable starch.

"It's still a new concept" for people to throw compostable forks and knives in the compost, said Shore. "They think they should go in the trash, but they go in the food waste."

Since 2008, the Monterey Regional Waste Manage-

ment District (MRWMD) has run a food scrap compost program out of its facility in Marina, processing food scraps from commercial businesses and special events — including the Big Sur International Marathon, which has been commended in the last few years for a record-breaking percentage of diverted waste.

"Special events are an effective time and place to divert these resources, and raise public awareness on this topic," said MRWMD's Kimberle Herring, speaking of the JFF's waste diversion efforts. "We know that there will not be a morsel of JFF latkes left on anyone's plate, but it is good to know that the plates, forks, condiment cups that are part of the serving of this delicious cultural dish will not be ending up in the landfill, but instead possibly on a local vineyard, or as a new plastic product."

While community-wide food waste composting is not yet available in Monterey County as it is in regions like Santa Cruz and the Bay Area (see sidebar), Shore and Arnow hope that seeing the diversion process at events like the JFF will inspire guests to do what they can to reduce waste in their own lives.

The extra expense makes instituting a waste diversion program no easy feat for small organizations. Compostable plates and utensils cost more than traditional plastic ones, not to mention the extra fees for transportation of the food waste. In fact, food waste diversion alone costs the JFF at least \$1500 more per year — as much as the



Frying latkes: In addition to conscientious waste sorting, the latke booth goes above and beyond to donate their used frying oil for use as biodiesel.

Below: Pastrami on rye, served fresh at the JFF on compostable plates.



rest of the waste combined. Especially at a fundraising event, costs like this are a burden.

Luckily, Waste Management, Inc. (WM), who provides and transports the dumpsters, has donated the cost of the food waste dumpster this year to help offset this burden. They are now an official sponsor, and Shore and Arnow spoke very highly of their efforts to keep as much waste as possible out of the landfill.

To get the waste diversion project off the ground, Shore looked to Kristin Cushman, founder of The Offset Project, a non-profit Monterey Peninsula organization that helps local businesses and events create environmentally sustainable policies. Cushman, a friend of Shore's, helped behind the scenes during the first years of the JFF Green Initiative.

Talking the two women as they prepared for another year's festival, I could see their dedication to taking the festival's sustainability project as far as it can go.

"Throwing anything away is a total waste — it wastes all the energy that went into extracting it, producing it, transporting it," said Arnow.

"Laura and I in our separate ways totally get that and are passionate about it," responded Shore. "This is one place where we were able to effect change and be leaders."

The 26th Annual Jewish Food Festival will take place on Sunday, August 25 from 10:30 am to 4:00 pm at Congregation Beth Israel, 5716 Carmel Valley Road in Carmel Valley.

A "big community party" and a way for the members of CBI to share their food and culture with others, the event is run entirely by volunteers — in the words of Shore, "the most renewable type of fuel."

For more information on the event, call (831) 624-2015 or visit [www.carmelbethisrael.org](http://www.carmelbethisrael.org).

### Will the Monterey Peninsula be getting residential food scrap composting?

The Monterey Regional Waste Management District's new composting system can process a wider variety of waste, including meats and certified-compostable utensils, than typical backyard compost piles, which are often limited to vegan food scraps. MRWMD now composts all landscape trimmings from curbside yard waste bins, in addition to local agricultural byproducts, and food scraps from businesses and commercial events like the Jewish Film Festival. (Any other local organizations interested in making their events "zero waste" should contact MRWMD.)

The new "SmartFerm" dry fermentation anaerobic digestion system safely breaks down this mixture of organic waste material. In addition to creating compost from the food scraps and green waste, the system also captures the methane gas released by the "digestion" process to generate electricity.

MRWMD has the capability of composting residential food scraps in addition to those from businesses and events. A new Model Franchise Agreement process, underway for all Monterey Peninsula cities except the City of Monterey, is currently considering food scrap collection.

It will be up to the individual cities, who each individually contract with curbside service providers like WM, to determine whether to provide curbside food scrap collection.



Model of the SmartFerm dry fermentation anaerobic digestion system. Photo courtesy of MRWMD.