

Understanding the Environmental Benefits of Food Waste Disposers

In today's world, food waste disposers are now considered an environmental appliance – much like *EnergyStar*-rated refrigerators and laundry machines. Disposers are now approved for sale in more than 80 countries, as a result of decades of research and widespread use that support the essential role disposers play in diverting food waste from collection trucks, landfills and incinerators. Thousands of municipalities know that capturing food waste through sewers and wastewater treatment plants – through which it is processed into biosolids for compost-quality soil improvement on agricultural lands – is far preferable to managing food waste along with other garbage.

Following are key facts about food waste, and food waste disposers that helped to inform those decisions:

Food waste characteristics:

- ❖ Food waste ranges from 15% to 20% of residential waste. (Materials generally designated for recycling programs average 35% to 40%.)
- ❖ Food waste averages 70% water, similar to human waste and the human body.
- ❖ The chemical composition of food waste is comparable to human waste.

Food waste collected as solid waste:

- ❖ Is stored in homes and buildings prior to collection.
- ❖ Ends up in trucks, transfer stations, landfills and incinerators.
- ❖ Causes odors, vermin and other noxious problems – as well as fuel use and truck emissions to transport.
- ❖ In incinerators, little energy is captured due to the high water content of food waste.
- ❖ In landfills, food waste decomposes rapidly, creating both leachate (toxic liquid) and methane (a gas that contributes to global warming), which landfills cannot fully capture.
- ❖ Very little residential food waste is composted, either in backyards, worm-bins or through municipal programs – which requires more advanced technology than yard waste, with feedstock, citing, odor-control and cost challenges.

Food waste pulverized through a food waste disposer and collected through sewers:

- ❖ Requires very little electricity and water to pulverize.
- ❖ Easily transports underground, using water to carry waste particles through sewer pipes.
- ❖ Is effectively removed at wastewater treatment plants.
- ❖ Is efficiently processed along with human waste.
- ❖ Is beneficially reused in fertilizer products – including some marketed directly to consumers – all of which is carefully regulated by federal and state laws.

