



The Future of Plastic Alternatives in Organic

Organic Week – Washington, D.C. – 5/10/2023



Founded in 1999, BPI is the leading authority on compostable products and packaging.



Certification

Rigorous scientific standards combined with cutting edge requirements for compostable product certification.



Education

Communication and marketing programs aligning stakeholders and highlighting the connection to climate change and the circular economy.



Advocacy

Comprehensive government affairs program that works to increase access to composting and remove barriers.

BPI Board of Directors

Representation across the value chain: biopolymer producers, paper manufacturers, foodservice product companies, consumer brands, and composters.



Compost Definitions and Growth of an Industry

- When NOP was established in 2000, composting was largely viewed as an on-farm activity using plant and animal materials.
- A national commercial composting industry has since emerged with 4,000-5,000 facilities, driven both by a demand for finished compost and by state requirements to divert food scraps and yard trimmings from landfills.
- States have also set mandates to decrease single-use plastic packaging and products, requiring them to be reusable, recyclable or compostable.



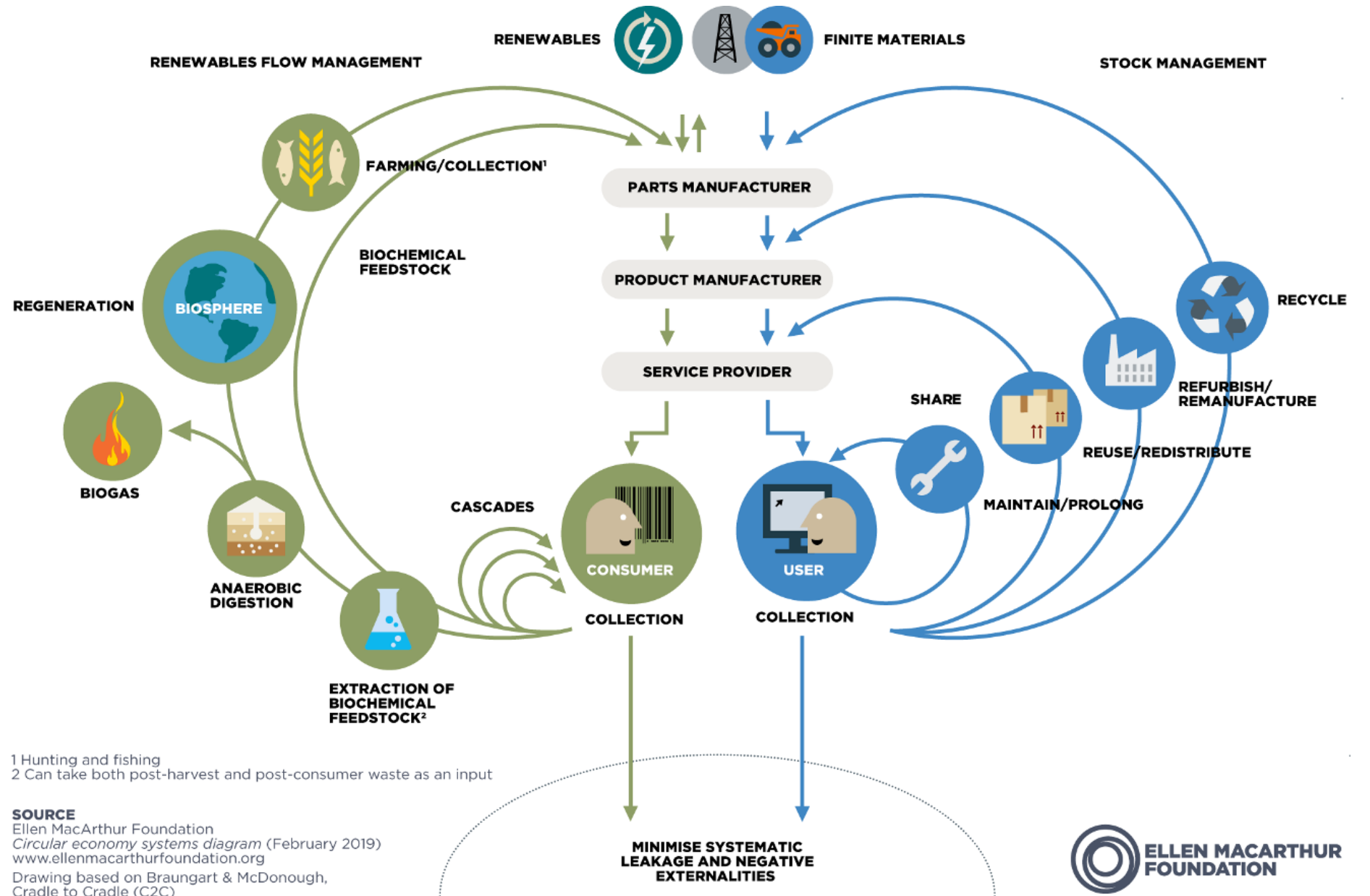
Organic Joining the Circular Economy

Why update NOP regulations regarding compost and composting?

- Emergence and global momentum behind the Circular Economy model to move away from the linear “take, make, waste” status quo.
- Challenge of contamination in compost piles from conventional packaging, leading to development of compostable products.
- Broader environmental concern around single-use plastics with a regulatory and voluntary push for reusable, recyclable or compostable.
- USDA/NOP priority on Climate-Smart Agriculture

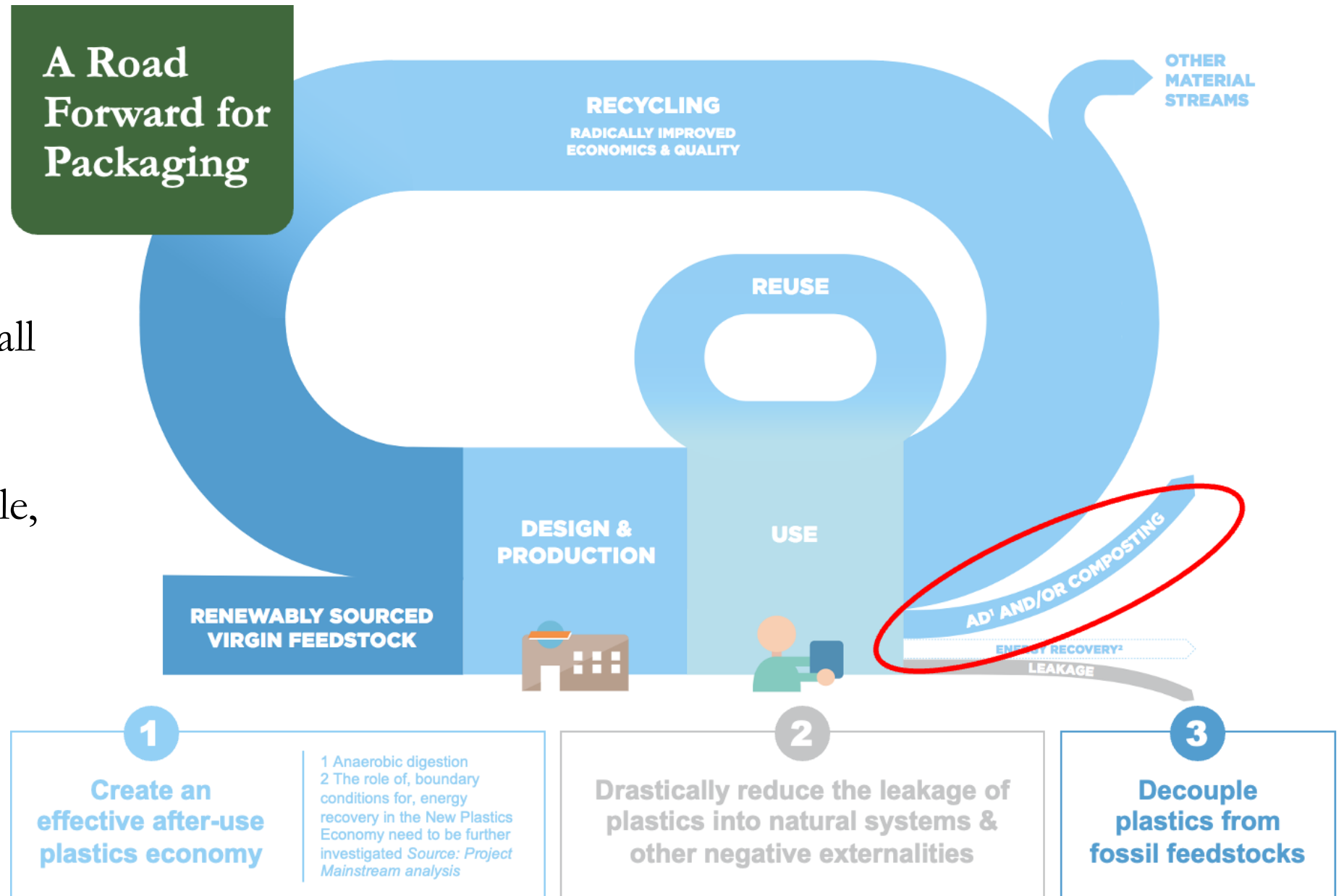


Compostability is not just a technical definition, but dependent on applications that fit the **system** in which the material will be collected, processed, and ultimately circulated back.



A Road Forward for Packaging

Compostability is a small part of the overall packaging solution, suited for non-recyclable, non-reusable, food-associated applications.



SOURCE: ELLEN MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

Compostability is a potentially great fit for food packaging identified as needing fundamental redesign and innovation -- small format, multi-material, uncommon materials, and nutrient-contaminated, are all **assets** for compostability, not detriments.

Figure 3: Plastic packaging segments that need fundamental redesign and innovation



FUNDAMENTAL REDESIGN AND INNOVATION is needed for >50% of plastic packaging (by no. of items), or >30% of plastic packaging (by weight)*

Source: Ellen MacArthur Foundation

California's Intersecting Composting Policies

SB 1383 - Requires reduction of “organic waste” (food scraps and yard trimmings) disposal by 75% to tackle short-lived climate pollutants

- Landfills are a top source of methane, which is far more harmful in the short term than carbon dioxide.

SB 54 - Requires single-use packaging to be recyclable or compostable and establishes extended producer responsibility (EPR) fees.

- Funding to composters will include fees from compostable products and packaging (to cover cost of processing) as well as fees from contaminants (to cover cost of screening/cleanup).

AB 1201 – Requires compostable products to be associated with materials composters accept (e.g. food scraps), be certified to ASTM standards, be clearly labeled, not use PFAS, and be “an allowable agricultural organic input under the requirements of the USDA National Organic Program” by 2026.



Why This Matters

- In contrast to recent legislative activity in multiple states promoting composting and compostable products, the NOP regulations developed more than 20 years ago require that organic compost be composed solely of decomposed “plant or animal materials.”
- This limitation is out of step with current materials science and is incompatible with the urgent need for consumer packaging and product choices that help abate methane gas production from landfills.



Use Case: Produce Stickers

Produce stickers help identify critical info and are particularly important for unpackaged fruit that is certified Organic.



However, these stickers are a “common contaminant” at composting facilities -- consumers leave them on the peel, they are nearly impossible to screen out at the composting facility, resulting in plastic in the finished compost.

Compostable alternatives have been developed and commercialized, including a project at the USDA Biomaterials Research center in Alameda, CA, but current NOP regulations would disqualify the resulting compost from being used for Organic agriculture.

And Adjustment vs. Course Correction

- Compost is already widely understood and used by Organic growers, so all that's needed are small adjustments to update definitions.
- ASTM compostability standards are already used in NOP regulations and have been shown to align with the NOP performance standard that compost not “contain a synthetic substance not on the National List.”



Importance and Urgency

Without a rule change, we will see a widening disconnect between NOP regulations and efforts to reduce environmental impact from food scraps and packaging, creating problems along the NOP value chain:

- **Organic growers** wanting to utilize more compost to regenerate and create resilient soils.
- **Organic retailers** seeking to reduce food waste and packaging sent to landfill, and requirements to comply with state laws to this effect.
- **Organic brands** investing in compostable solutions to move away from non-recyclable packaging, whether voluntarily as trailblazers or to comply with state laws.
- **Organic consumers** who don't want single-use plastics, who want to compost and tackle climate change, and who view Organic as leading the way.

Conclusions

- Harmonizing state and federal definitions of compost feedstock would preempt conflicts regarding the definition of compost.
- This is in keeping with scientific advancements and materials science innovations and aligns with requirements to restrict the presence of synthetic substances in compost approved for use on Organic farms and ranches.
- It would lower the costs for compost approved for Organic growers, improving the quantity, quality, and availability.
- It supports the NOP's request for Climate-Smart Agriculture and state compost goals to reduce methane emissions.



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