

Case Study: Farmington, New Mexico



Sustainability Programs in Farmington, New Mexico

Farmington, New Mexico, a small blue-collar city bordering the Navajo Nation in the northwestern corner of the state, is home to one of the top five natural gas resources in America. Although it had little history with sustainability initiatives prior to 2008, Farmington used its renewal of waste services with Waste Management to launch what has become one of the most successful municipal waste recycling programs in the country.

After initial debate, Farmington and Waste Management worked to initiate a single-stream recycling program in 2008. The program allows residents to place all their recyclables — including paper, plastic and metals — into a single container for curbside pickup. The single-stream program is not only more convenient for residents; it reduces costs by using single-compartment recycling trucks. Although the upfront investment necessary to launch the program was substantial, the savings the city will enjoy by not having to expand or build landfills is expected to far exceed these initial outlays.

To maximize community engagement, the single stream recycling program was supported by an extensive public education campaign. Residents received multiple notices and flyers by mail and in-person via route drivers, and the city included program information in its quarterly residential newsletter. The city also placed

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stories in local papers and on area TV and radio. Dozens of community members volunteered to walk door-to-door, educating their neighbors on the new program. Although Farmington had originally hoped for a 20 percent participation rate in the first year of curbside recycling, this outreach program resulted in an actual community participation rate of nearly 50 percent.

Due to the success, WM recently expanded its Farmington program to include the collection and disposal of electronic waste (e-waste), as well as residential hazardous waste such as compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs) and batteries.

In addition, Farmington has allocated four million dollars to construct a Material Recycling Facility (MRF) to support its new single-stream recycling program. When completed in 2011, this MRF will make Farmington the de facto center of progressive waste disposal in New Mexico.

Farmington was rewarded for its efforts in June 2010 and received an environmental excellence award from the New Mexico Recycling Coalition. By combining forces and putting their focus on a common goal, Waste Management and the City of Farmington continue to blaze new trails in environmental sustainability.