

ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

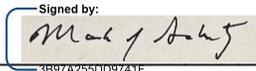
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Arlington County
Program Title: On-Street Food Scraps Collection Program for Multi-family Building Residents
Program Category: Agriculture, Environmental, & Energy

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Mark J. Schwartz
Title: County Manager
Signature: 

Arlington County On-Street Food Scraps Collection Program for Multi-family Building Residents

Program Overview

In July 2024, Arlington County deployed fourteen on-street bins for the collection of food scraps from residents living in high-density multi-family areas of the County. The On-Street Food Scraps Collection Program for Multi-family Building Residents (“On-Street Food Scraps Program”) was created to give multifamily dwelling residents an alternative to sending their food waste to incineration and/or landfilling. The program allows Arlington County to continue expanding waste diversion efforts and make strides in pursuing its sustainability goals.

With the launch of the On-street Food Scraps Program, Arlington County became the first county in the Commonwealth to implement this type of on-street food scraps collection. The program has been successful and well received, as revealed by the number of participants and weight of material collected. As of June 19, 2025, the program currently has 2,415 participants and has collected 109,675 pounds of food scraps since the bins were deployed on July 9, 2024. We expect the number of participants to continue growing. The On-street Food Scraps Collection Program has been a significant step forward in the County’s efforts to increase food waste diversion.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

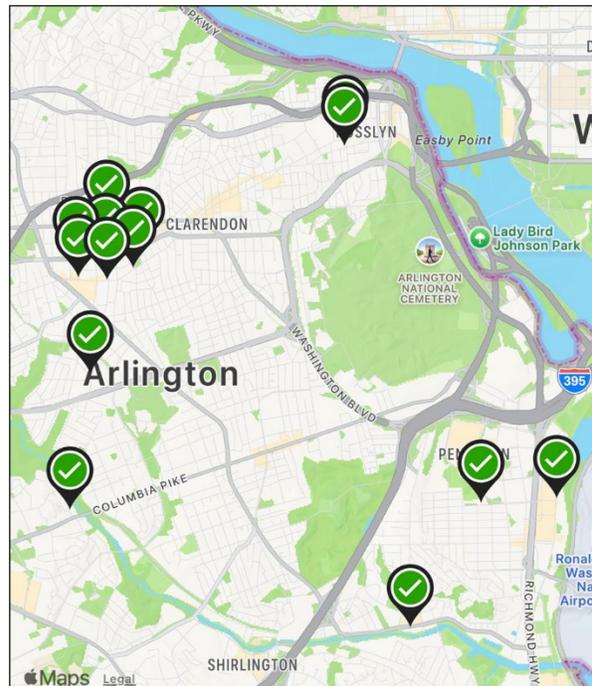


Image 1 depicts the locations of the fourteen bins that County deployed.

According to the EPA, over one-third of the overall food supply is wasted every year in the United States. Besides impacts on food security and resource conservation, food waste accounts for approximately 16% of total U.S. methane emissions that come from landfills. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas with 84-87 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. Diverting food waste from landfills can, therefore, lessen the impact of climate change as well as conserve and reuse organic resources.

In Arlington, nearly 72% of County residents live in multi-family residences with limited food waste diversion options. Approximately 20 percent of the single-family residential waste stream consists of food waste, data that implies significant potential for diverting food waste within the multi-family sector away from incineration or landfill. Diverting these materials from the trash presents a significant opportunity for Arlington to advance its waste reduction goals.

In November 2015, the Arlington County Board adopted a zero-waste resolution aimed at increasing waste diversion to at least 90 percent by 2038 for Arlington County as a whole. The Arlington County Department of Environmental Services- Solid Waste Bureau (“SWB”) has been tasked with developing and administering the programs to achieve this goal. The County’s Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP), adopted in June 2024, includes voluntary food scrap diversion programs for the multi-family and commercial sectors and guides our efforts. Food scraps and wasted food represent a significant portion of the County’s waste stream, making increased diversion critical to achieving this goal.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Arlington’s Food Scraps Program offers an innovative example for other Virginia communities to divert a significant portion of the residential waste stream. As the first locality in Virginia to offer this type of program to multi-family residents, Arlington has created a replicable model for other Virginia communities to follow for on-street food scraps collection. Arlington’s On-street Food Scraps Program is

very similar to many food scraps drop-off programs, but brings the convenience of proximity and 24 hours access to residents. The on-street program is a great way to begin a new program or supplement already existing food scraps collection points such as a single drop-off location or farmers markets. The on-street food scraps program creates a base upon which to scale and replicate Arlington’s success. The deployment of the collection bins throughout Arlington and learning to use the software were relatively easy.

The SWB launched this program in tandem with our Avoid Food Waste Campaign. The SWB held

seven on-site tabling events specifically for the deployments of the collection bins for the On-street Food Scraps Collection for Multi-family Residents, which engaged approximately 85 residents. Staff also



Image 2: The County handout created for distribution to residents letting them know how they can participate in the program (frontside) and a list of acceptable items (backside).

tabled at two other events engaging approximately 3500 residents. The bins are wrapped with easy to follow instructions on how to participate, which includes a QR code linking to the program’s webpage where additional resources and videos are available for viewing as well as links to download the app. This allows passersby to quickly understand what the bins are for and how to participate.

Several materials were created for outreach and education. Handouts were created in English and Spanish for the tabling events. Avoid Food Waste posters were hung in every bus shelter as well as in

advertising space within buses. “How-to” posters were hung in bus shelters near the collection bins. These posters were also distributed to nearby apartment buildings to hang in their trash rooms. Yard signs were placed roadside at nine highly trafficked intersections to raise awareness. All print material contained QR codes directing residents to the County’s page to access additional resources. The 14 containers have an exterior wrap that provides self-advertising and provides residents with how-to instructions and what materials are acceptable for drop-off. Most of the efforts to successfully implement this program consisted of education and outreach, which can be easily undertaken by most communities.

Additionally, successful collections and program operations depended greatly on the manufacturer’s bin design and “smart” features. BigBelly compost bins require that users download an app to a smart device which unlocks the bin when a resident is within range. This helps prevent contamination in the material stream by making use of the bin intentional, so it does not become just another trash bin along the street. The bins also connect remotely to a dashboard that allows County staff to remotely monitor fullness levels, allowing for collections only when needed.

How the program was carried out, including financing and staffing, and program’s results:

Arlington County On-Street Food Scraps Collection Program is an innovative initiative designed to reduce the County’s multi-family residential sector’s environmental footprint by promoting sustainable waste management practices. The program provides bins for the on-street drop-off of food scraps in high-density multi-family residential areas of the County, making it convenient and easy for residents to divert food scraps. Instead of being thrown in the trash and sent to a waste to energy facility or landfill, food scraps are processed into nutrient-rich compost. By turning waste into a resource, the initiative supports a circular economy, promotes food waste awareness, and mitigates greenhouse gas emissions.

The financial impact of adding the on-street food scraps program for residents is quite reasonable overall. The SWB, through a combination of methods, was able to implement this program through a creative use of resources available to our organization without adding significant costs. The County utilized



Image 3 Left: An Arlington resident deposits food scraps into a collection bin; Center: A collection bin located near a bus shelter near Arlington Mill Community Center; Right: Arlington County SWB staff opens a bin to show how they are emptied.

a combination of Virginia Litter Grant funds and money from the SWB annual budget to purchase the fourteen “smart” bins from BigBelly. Existing staff took on the added responsibility of monitoring, emptying, and cleaning the bins when they reach capacity. This extra responsibility for existing staff allowed the organization to avoid any additional personnel costs to service the bins. Other one-time costs for bin setup (concrete pads, compostable bags, and dispensers) as well as educational and promotional materials for the On-street Food Scraps Program added to the overall programmatic costs. In total, the SWB spent approximately \$97,248 to launch the program. The program is free to residents and no registration is required but they do need to download an app to a Bluetooth enabled smart device that allows them to unlock the bin once they are within range. The app is maintained by BigBelly as part of the service offering. After the initial year there is a per bin technology fee for maintaining the connection to the cloud and dashboard.

Since its launch, Arlington County’s On-street Food Scraps Program has been well received and has resulted in significant food waste diversion. From July 9, 2024, to June 19, 2025, the program has had 2,415 unique users and successfully collected and diverted 109,675 pounds of food scraps that would have otherwise been incinerated or landfilled. By diverting this organic waste from incineration/landfill to composting, the County is turning food waste into nutrient-rich soil that is made available for residents to be used for gardening and landscaping. This, in turn, supports healthier soil and plant growth from material that would have otherwise been incinerated. This initiative contributes to Arlington’s zero waste

goal of 90 percent diversion away from landfilling and incineration by providing expanded opportunities for residents to divert food scraps from the trash stream.

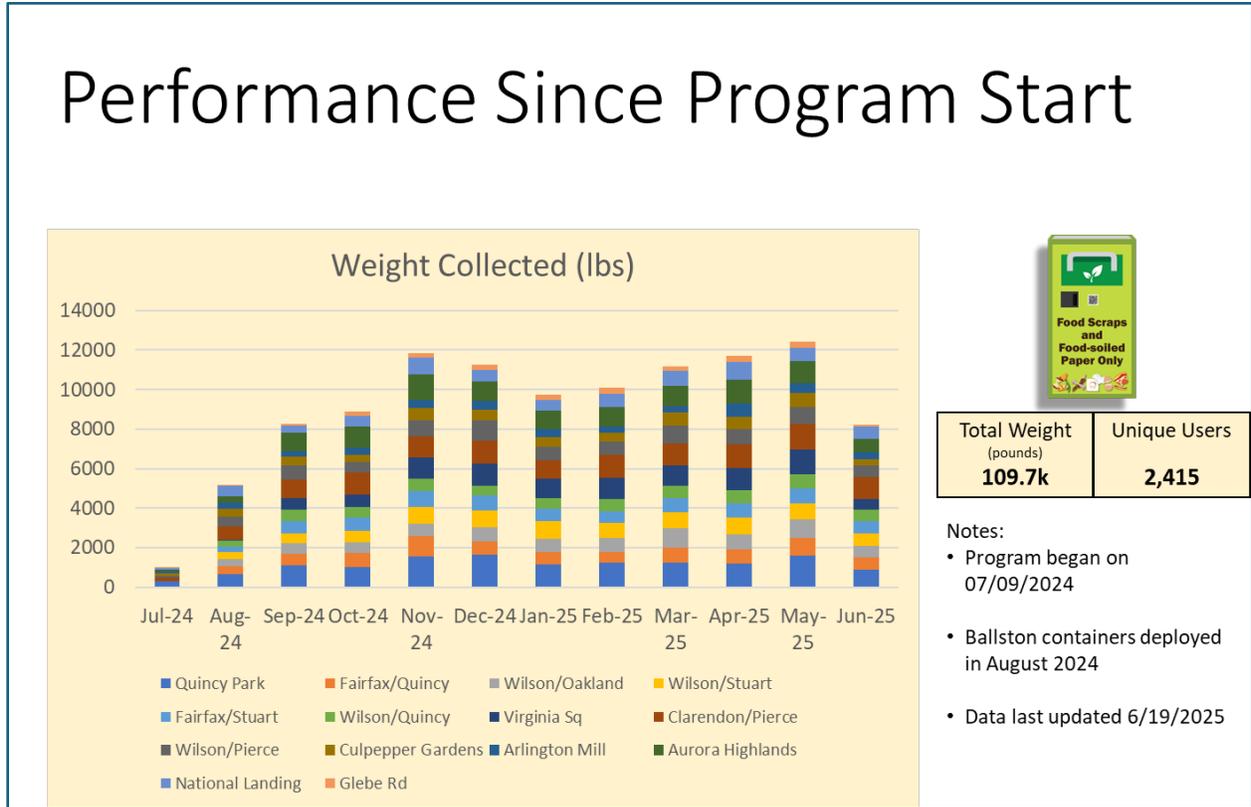


Image 4 The table displays the collection weights by month and location. The total weight and total number of unique users is displayed on the right.

Brief Overview (Used for press releases, brochures, etc):

Arlington County’s On-street Food Scraps Collection for Multi-family Building Residents aims to reduce the amount of food waste in the trash stream by creating a system which allows residents in apartment buildings and condos to participate in food scraps diversion by providing 14 collection sites located in high-density multi-family areas. These sites, located conveniently around the county, are equipped with smart collection bins specifically for food scraps. Residents can dispose of food scraps and food soiled paper items, which are then collected and processed into compost. The program helps reduce landfill waste and supports Arlington’s zero waste and sustainability goals by making food scraps diversion accessible to multi-family households.

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The program has been highly successful, already diverting 109,675 pounds (54.84 tons) of food scraps from July 9 to June 19, 2025, and plans to expand the program to other high density residential areas of the County are currently underway. Factors such as density and housing affordability are being used in GIS tools to determine optimal deployment sites for any future program expansion.