

# Monterey County Fair 2012

Sustainability in action

A case study

by The Offset Project

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Address: 2004 Fairground Rd., Monterey, CA 93940

Phone: 831-372-5863

Web: <http://www.montereycountyfair.com>

## Event Description

### Our Commitment

The Monterey County Fairgrounds is committed to piloting environmental sustainability initiatives at the Monterey County Fair, held August 9 – September 3, 2012, and other Fairgrounds events. While the Fairgrounds has been recycling during its events for XXX years, in February 2012 the venue committed to increasing waste diversion through a first-time food waste program run in 27 catering and vending areas in the back of house during Fair. Food waste and other compostable items were composted or sent to an anaerobic digester at the [Monterey Regional Waste Management District](#) in Marina, California. Food scrap diversion not only reduces waste, but also lowers methane emissions and reduces impacts created from the production of virgin soil amendments and energy.

### Our Actions and Tangible Impacts

- **The Offset Project, an area 501(c)3, and the Fairgrounds' stewarding crew diverted 3,800 pounds of food from 27 catering and vending areas in 2012.** Food scraps and other compostable items not only produce waste at the end of their useful lives, but also release methane emissions — a potent greenhouse gas roughly 23 times more devastating to the climate than CO2 emissions. **The 3,800 diverted pounds of food waste avoided approximately 7.6 tons of CO2 equivalent from entering the atmosphere.**
- The Monterey County Fairgrounds venue was provided with 27 green 32-gallon barrels labeled with “Compost” stickers and descriptive images. The Offset Project donated stickers while the [Monterey Peninsula Foundation](#) provided grant funding for the food waste collection infrastructure. Barrels are intended for caterer or vendor use at all future events at The Monterey County Fairgrounds. [Monterey City Disposal Service](#) donated the servicing of one 20-yard food waste dumpster collecting food waste throughout the event.



Caterers in the Turf Club fill a compost bin with unwanted food on Sunday.



Members of the Fairgrounds operations and maintenance crew lift a full food waste bin into the food waste dumpster at Fair.

### Intangible Impacts

- In 2012, The Offset Project took the first step toward training event caterers and vendors, which return to the event each year. The majority

of caterers and vendors were receptive to the new food waste and compostables diversion practices, though the program requires one extra step in sorting. A handful of caterers commented that they have been eager to participate in such a program for years or that they are already accustomed to such practices at fairs in San Francisco. All caterers were quite proficient at food waste separation by the event's end and expect to participate in 2013. Environmental education — and specifically waste diversion practices — further spread into the Monterey Peninsula community and beyond.

- The Offset Project and the Fairgrounds staff adjusted to the new food waste stewarding route and inter-team communication. Staff tied one or two yellow bins to a cart to consolidate food from kitchen areas and steward to the food waste dumpster. Operations are expected to run even more smoothly in 2013. Monterey Disposal haulers are also adjusting to adding food waste dumpsters to their pickup route, and to ensuring that the food waste dumpsters arrive uncontaminated at the composting site in Marina.
- The Monterey County Fairgrounds has emerged as new environmental leaders in waste diversion, which may encourage other environmental programs at the venue in the future. Through press releases announcing this new program, both entities benefit from marketing value and act as environmental educators for similar entities, the Peninsula and beyond.



**Offset Project staff speaks with a Fair caterer about how to use the venue's new composting system.**

## Challenges Going Forward

Like any new program, there are always hurdles to overcome, wrinkles to iron out, and challenges going forward. The first challenge is simply for the Fairgrounds staff to become even more familiar with the details of the new food waste route. This means leaving green composting bins unlined, using them for compostables only, and establishing a route that is most efficient for the stewarding crews and vendors. Full bins can become very heavy and hinder vendors and caterers from composting once they are full, yet constant servicing of bins is not efficient if stewards are not traveling past food waste dumpsters. An expanded food waste program may require a small stewarding crew designated for food waste pickup. This would also help in ensuring that bins are uncontaminated.

There was a lack of recycle bins and trash bins in the kitchens, which encourages contamination of food waste containers and causes recyclable materials to be trashed. Kitchen food waste bins should be paired with trash and recycle bins.

Most caterers and vendors use materials such as plastic forks and butter packets, which easily fall into food waste during after-service scraping of plates. Caterers and vendors could be encouraged

to reduce or replace all such kitchen materials that are not compostable. Sorting in the kitchens will improve over time. Fairgrounds staff should also encourage vendors and caterers to use the compost bins to their maximum potential, and find a place for storage inside their enclosures and out of the public eye to discourage contamination.

### **Useful Links:**

[theoffsetproject.org](http://theoffsetproject.org)

[montereycountyfairgrounds.com](http://montereycountyfairgrounds.com)

[mrwmd.org](http://mrwmd.org)

[montereypeninsulafoundation.org](http://montereypeninsulafoundation.org)

[montereydisposal.com](http://montereydisposal.com)