

Closing the Loop

How Compost Awareness Week Brings Circularity to Providence Schools

In Providence, a group of “food smart” schools are showing what happens when sustainability becomes part of the school day. Through the Rhode Island School Recycling Project (RISRP), students are taking part in a full-circle solutions to wasted food where they can see and touch almost every step. From separating their apple cores into the food scraps bins during lunchtime, visiting a composting site, and planting vegetables in their school's garden beds, students are exploring a circular system that reduces waste and enriches Rhode Island’s natural environment.



Circularity is the idea that systems are designed in a way that minimizes waste through reuse and recycling while maximizing resource utilization like composting organic waste to fertilize soils. In a circular economy, products and materials are kept in circulation through processes such as maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacturing, recycling, and composting. In schools participating in RISRP’s food recovery and food scrap diversion program, students become agents of circularity by dumping their food scraps into a compost bin and then adding compost, made from their lunchroom waste sorting activities, into a schoolyard garden bed.

This year, RISRP saw International Compost Awareness Week in May as an opportunity to elevate the learning experience by offering schools more hands-on opportunities and holding an Earth Care Farm field trip raffle.

Interest was immediate. Schools responded enthusiastically, eager to bring the message and practice of circularity to life in their own schoolyard.

In Spring 2025, RISRP delivered compost and compost/soil mix from Earth Care Farm to eight Providence schools. Raised beds were built at four schools (George West, Young & Woods, Sackett, and Webster Avenue), and students got to work shoveling compost, planning garden layouts, and planting flowers, herbs, and veggies. RISRP’s gardening expert Amelia Lufrano guided the planting process and introduced students to vermicomposting, inviting them to interact with red wigglers and learn how worms help break down organic waste into nutrients for the soil.

Leviton Dual Language School won the raffle and sent 4th and 5th-grade students on an unforgettable visit to Earth Care Farm.

At the farm, students explored the composting process from start to finish, examining different compost ingredients and learning how microbes help break down materials, including elephant manure from the Roger Williams Zoo.



One student was amazed to learn that soil contains billions of living organisms, saying, "You mean everywhere we look outside there's life?" Another was inspired by farm owner Jayne Merner's enthusiasm, asking, "Wait...you get paid to have fun?" That moment captured the heart of Compost Awareness Week: showing students that sustainability is not just important, but joyful and deeply connected to our daily lives.

The trip ended with a picnic at Ninigret Park and a storytelling session with storyteller Rafini beside Erik Rock, a giant troll made entirely of recycled wood by Danish artist Thomas Dambo. Students left with dirt under their fingernails a clearer sense of their place in a circular system, and a growing pride in their role as environmental stewards.



To learn more about bringing the RISRP Get Food Smart program to your school, visit rircyclingclub.org.

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