Compostable Products Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

Meeting #3: Tuesday December 5, 2023 | 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Location: Zoom

Attendance

Members of the Advisory Council, Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), Cascadia Consulting Group (Cascadia), and the public attended the meeting.

20 out of 26 Advisory Committee members attended (those who attended are marked with *):

Name	Affiliation
Alex Truelove*	BPI
Amy Clow*	WSDA
Patti Stacey	Kittitas County
Chris Averyt	City of Spokane
Dan Corum*	City of Tacoma
Gena Jain*	City of Kirkland
Heather Trim*	Zero Waste Washington
Janet Thoman*	CMA
Jay Blazey	Cedar Grove
Jenny Slepian*	Eco Products
Kate Kurtz*	City of Seattle
Liv Johansson*	WORC
Lewis Griffith*	City of Tacoma
Ryan Dicks*	Pierce County

Name	Affiliation
Mark Chidester*	City of Richland
Reingard Rieger*	Tilth Alliance
Ron Jones*	City of Olympia
Samantha Louderback	Washington Hospitality Association
Samantha Winkle*	Waste Connections
Scott Deatherage*	Barr-Tech
Shannon Pinc*	NatureWorks
Alli Kingfisher*	Ecology
Wendy Weiker*	Republic Services
Peter Godlewski	Association of WA Businesses
Zonell Tateishi	Yakima County
Rod Whittaker*	WRRA

3 Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) members attended, but did not participate as Advisory Committee members:

- Mary Harrington
- Chery Sullivan
- Cullen Naumoff

4 staff from Cascadia Consulting Group (Cascadia) attended as meeting facilitators and support:

- Maddie Seibert
- Nicole Gutierrez
- Taylor Magee
- Brent Edgar

3 members of the public attended.

Meeting goals

- Finalize operating procedures.
- Determine next steps to define compostable products.
- Confirm updated research plan and outline information requests.
- Review literature review results and discuss findings.
- Begin challenge identification process.

Agenda

Duration	Agenda Item
10 min	Welcome, agenda, & objectives
10min	Confirm Draft Operating Procedures
25 min	Determine next steps to define compostable products
20 min	Confirm updated research plan and outline information requests
45 min	Review Literature Review Summary
5 min	Public comment
5 min	Closing remarks and preview next steps

Welcome and Introductions

Maddie began the meeting and welcomed Advisory Committee members. She presented Zoom tips and best practices for the meeting, took attendance, went over the meeting agenda and community agreements, reviewed ways for community members/ members of the public to engage with the Advisory Committee both inside and outside the meeting, and addressed technology tips and a guide to using MURAL, the interactive discussion tool used during the meeting.

Maddie noted the changes to the "Chat" feature, which now allows the public to engage via chat, rather than only Committee members. She also presented our pulse survey results from Meeting #2, which demonstrate that the group enjoys using MURAL for discussion activities, would like to spend less time on housekeeping measures, and appreciates the facilitation team's ability to stay on time.

Confirm Draft Operating Procedures

- Maddie reviewed feedback on the Draft Operating Procedures from Meeting #2 which included three topics: proxies, replacement of members, and voting process.
    - Committee members are not permitted to send a proxy in their place. In the event a member cannot attend a meeting, another person from their organization is welcome to attend as a guest. Committee members will be provided alternative engagement opportunities in the case of absence.
    - In the event a Committee member leaves the group, they may be replaced if their departure occurs before March 2024. If a member departs the group after March 2024, Ecology is electing not to replace the member, and move forward with Committee decision making processes.
    - The voting scale reflects comments made from Committee members in Meeting #2, and "veto" has been replaced with "do not support". The voting scale now goes from 1, "whole-hearted endorsement" to 5, "do not support".

- Comments/ Questions from the group:
    - Heather Trim commented that a dissenting vote should be paired with a paragraph that is checked with all dissenters.
    - Maddie replied that this was the Facilitation team's intention and shall be put into effect.

Determine Next Steps to Define Compostable Products

- Maddie introduced our current working definition for compostable products which was introduced in Meeting #2. The definition is already encompassed in Washington state law (RCW 70A.455.040 Requirements for a product labeled "compostable"), although we are only referencing the first part of the definition, as below, as the second part concerns labeling requirements for products:
    - A product labeled as "compostable" that is sold, offered for sale, or distributed for use in Washington by a producer must:
        - Meet ASTM standard specification D6400;
        - Meet ASTM standard specification D6868; or
        - Be comprised of wood, which includes renewable wood, or fiber-based substrate only.
- In working towards defining compostable products, Maddie proposed the creation of a Working Group to continue shaping the Committee's working definition. The Working Group would meet once or twice in January, after the January Committee Meeting.
    - Those interested in joining the Working Group included: Jenny Slepian, Heather Trim, Alex Truelove, Janet Thoman, Shannon Pinc, Alli Kingfisher, Liv Johansson, and Pattie Stacey.
- Comments / Questions from the group:
    - Heather asked for a doodle poll to schedule the Working Group meeting rather than just proposing a date rather than establishing a date that people may not be able to attend.
    - Maddie replied that this is the plan.

Confirm Updated Research Plan and Outline Information Requests

- Maddie presented the Research Plan status update, including what we've recently completed and what our next steps are. Immediate next steps include written requests for information from Committee members. She then highlighted what will be included in the OMM facility interviews and who we plan to interview. Maddie went over our process for sharing information with the Committee, which includes monthly research memos.
- During meeting #2, the Committee suggested the research plan and questions include GHG emissions and toxic chemical contamination (mainly PFAS), which the facilitation team included in the literature review.
- Maddie also presented our focus area within existing and overarching topics, which include contamination, financial incentives & funding, policies, and the breakdown of compostable products.

Review Literature Review Results

- Maddie presented an overview of our literature review, which researched six topics, including: compostable products and standards related to breakdown of materials, consumer confusion caused by noncompostable products, current laws related to compostable products in WA, work products from contemporaneous stakeholder advisory committees, downstream impacts of compost, and current infrastructure related to compostable products management.
- The three key takeaways across research topics include:
    - Compostable product standards and certifications:
        - Two key third-party certifiers are BPI and CMA. BPI conducts lab testing for compostability whereas CMA does field testing.
        - Industrial composters have disputed that certified compostable products breakdown fully at their facilities in their processing cycle (i.e., Oregon Composters, A1 Organics in Denver).
        - There are currently no U.S. standards for home compostability
    - Consumer confusion & contamination:
        - Main drivers behind consumer confusion around compostable products are conflicting and unclear labeling and jurisdictional inconsistencies in organics collection programs across and within jurisdictions.
        - Most prevalent contaminants in compost streams include a variety of plastics (most notably plastic film, garbage bags, and rigid plastics), glass, noncompostable paper, and treated wood.
    - Current laws & infrastructure in WA:
        - Recent WA legislation works towards improving management of organic materials and increasing food donation, composting, and anaerobic digestion. Notable points of legislation include 2022 WA HB 1799 and 2022 WA Plastic Product Degradability Law.
        - WA is joined by Colorado, Minnesota, California, and Maryland in requiring third-party certification for compostable products and prohibiting misleading labeling practices.
- Questions / Comments from the group:
    - Another important theme I hope is what can be learned from other states' and countries' laws.
    - There are now two Oregon composters that do accept compostable products since that letter was written in 2017.
    - BPI spoke with A1 Organics in Denver after their claims of products not fully breaking down, and A1 has since mended their statement to say that look-like products are an issue. Moving forward, the group would like for claims of items not breaking down to be substantiated in some way.
    - Composters pull out any item resembling plastic, regardless of compostability. We are perpetuating more confusion by promoting items that look like recyclable and plastic type items. By promoting compostable products, are we deterring individuals from reducing waste generated? Is it better than having plastic cups that can be recycled?

Discussion

The Committee was then divided into two breakout rooms to discuss the Literature Review Summary. The group discussed these guiding questions:

1. What does this research tell us about what is working to achieve *"the state's goal of managing organic materials, including food waste, in an environmentally sustainable way that increases food waste diversion and ensure that finished compost is clean and marketable*?*"*
2. What does it tell us about what is not working to achieve the state's goal?
3. Where do we see opportunities and barriers to improve compostable products management in Washington state?
4. In what areas do we still need more information to move this committee's work forward?
5. Are there findings that do not align with your experience? If so, what is the difference?

Themes synthesized from MURAL board responses are below. Please see the Appendix for full responses.

1. What does this research tell us about what is working to achieve "the state's goal of managing organic materials, including food waste, in an environmentally sustainable way that increases food waste diversion and ensure that finished compost is clean and marketable?"

- HB 1799 provides a good foundation for managing compostable products, but more work is needed to address lookalike products and educate consumers.
- There are questions about what "clean and marketable" final compost product means.
- The labelling law is a good start, but it doesn't begin until Summer 2024, so it isn't possible to be sure of real impacts.

2. What does it tell us about what is not working to achieve the state's goal?

- There is a lot of complexity in the goal. One element of complexity is that facilities utilize different composting techniques and even within composting techniques, there are many parameters that influence how quickly items break down.
- Not all composters trust the certification standards and the standards may not reflect conditions on the ground at facilities.
- Consumer confusion is a major issue and cause of contamination.
- Education is difficult in multi-family settings and commercial sectors.
- Lookalike products, or compostable products that look like non-compostable plastic alternatives, increase consumer confusion.
- Can we rely on educating consumers and businesses or do we need to fix the problem upstream with standards and/or product bans?
    - Would it be more effective to focus education on businesses or households?
    - What is the best kind of preventive education? Who do we reach, and how do we reach them?
- There is not yet enough funding for HB1799 and composting education and measures. Are facilities responsible for funding these programs?

3. Where do we see opportunities and barriers to improve compostable products management in Washington state?
    - There's too much variability across the state regarding composting standards and definitions for compostability. There is an opportunity for consistent composting framework and regulations
    - Standards should work for composting facilities, including breakdown time. Standards should also reflect different technologies and compost processes used in the state.
    - Currently there are no home compostability standards in WA, so there is an opportunity to identify home compostability standards.
    - A current barrier is consumer confusion, so there is an opportunity to increase education and consider requiring that some item types be only produced as compostable products, not lookalikes.
    - Funding as a barrier: local governments need funding for enforcement.
    - There is a need for more facility capacity.
    - Pressure to accept and process a high volume of feedstock can be a barrier to processing compostable products if facilities decrease their processing time. There is an opportunity to understand the impact that diversion laws have on facilities' ability to create and sell good compost.
4. In what areas do we still need more information to move this committee's work forward?
    - How do compostable products compare to recyclable products in terms of environmental impacts? What are the GHG emission differences between these options?
    - It could be beneficial to check with facilities that accept compostable products and compare final product against facilities that do not accept compostable products.
    - Do compostable products add any benefit to the resulting compost? How do they impact the marketability of final compost, including organics certifications?
    - How much food waste is diverted through introducing compostable products? Do some compostables help more than others?
    - What enforcement tools are available? Who do they target?
    - Where and why is composting working well?
5. Are there findings that do not align with your experience? If so, what is the difference?
    - Disagreement on whether certified compostable products fully breakdown in composting facilities. There is anecdotal evidence to support these claims, but some noted that testing has not been available to determine whether compostable products or lookalikes remain in finished compost.

Public Comment

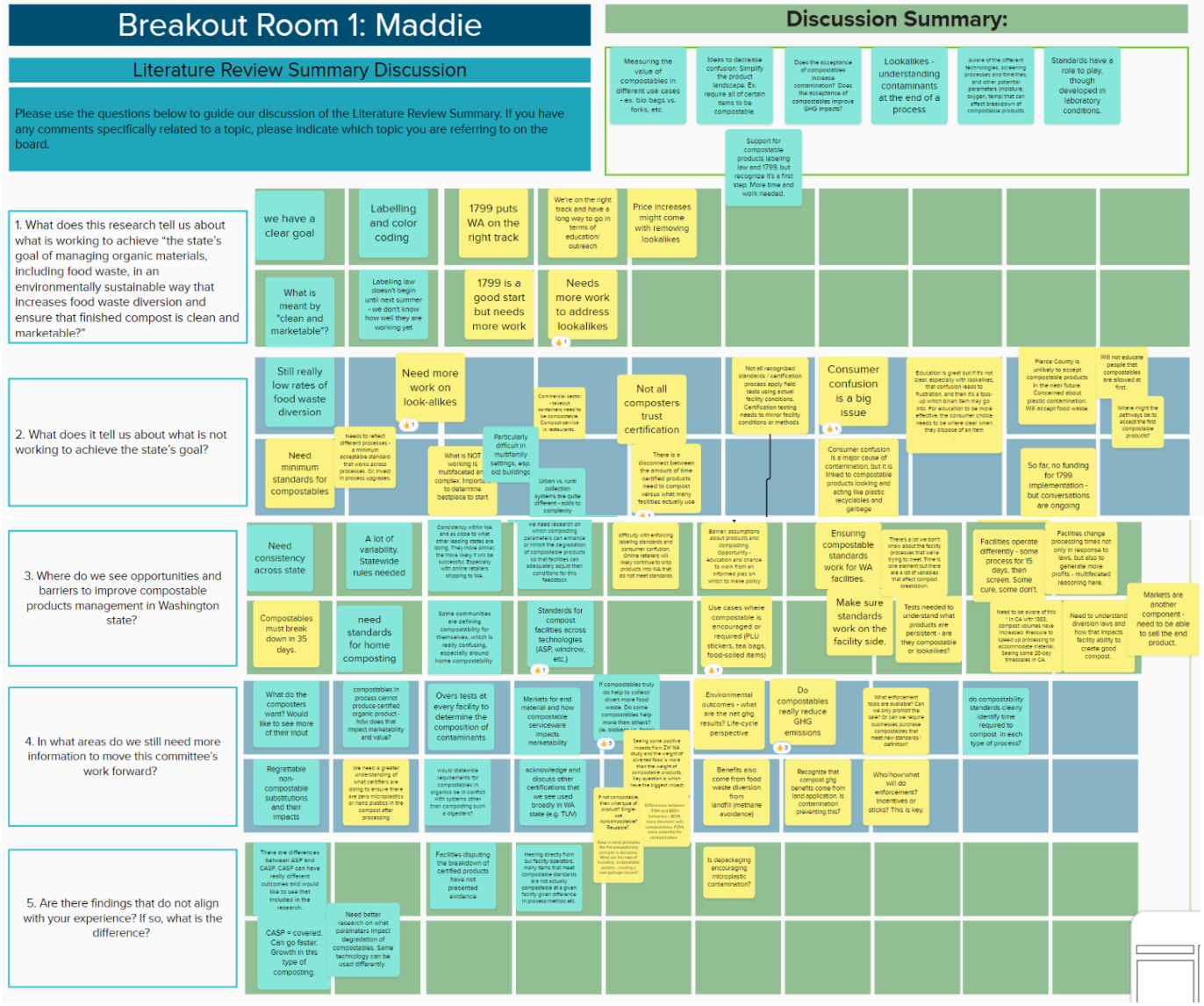
- A comment reminded the Committee to shift from calling the law "HB 1799" to the Organics Management Law, since the bill number may be changed in the future.

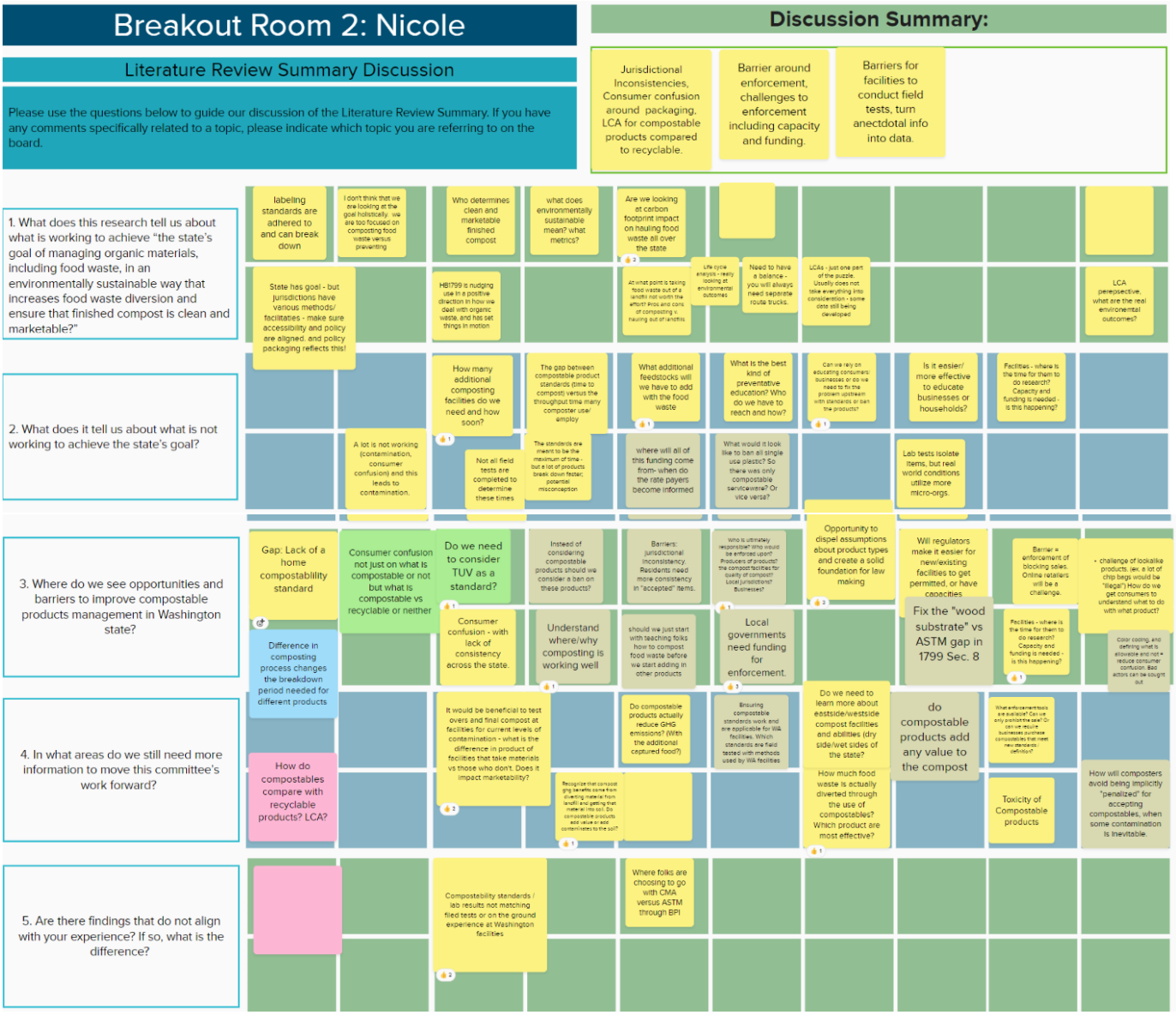
Next Steps

- Cascadia will send written information requests for advisory committee members.
- Next meeting will be January 9, 2-4pm:

  - Discuss organics waste characterization study data
  - Hear from ASTM representative on ASTM standards related to compostability.
  - Refine the lists of challenges and opportunities raised in December.
- Questions / Comments:
  - If we have questions or items, we'd like to add to the literature review, will we have the opportunity to continue the literature review as a working document?
    - Maddie replied that we can loop these comments into other research methods, however the lit review is complete.
  - Heather commented that the chosen date for the January meeting won't work for many Committee members.
    - Maddie replied that we may be able to revisit the date.

Appendix: MURAL Board Activity




Breakout Room 2: Nicole
Literature Review Summary Discussion
Please use the questions below to guide our discussion of the Literature Review Summary. If you have any comments specifically related to a topic, please indicate which topic you are referring to on the board.
Discussion Summary:
Jurisdictional Inconsistencies, Consumer confusion around packaging, LCA for compostable products compared to recyclable.
Barrier around enforcement, challenges to enforcement including capacity and funding.
Barriers for facilities to conduct field tests, turn anectdotal info into data.
1. What does this research tell us about what is working to achieve "the state's goal of managing organic materials, including food waste, in an environmentally sustainable way that increases food waste diversion and ensure that finished compost is clean and marketable?"
2. What does it tell us about what is not working to achieve the state's goal?
3. Where do we see opportunities and barriers to improve compostable products management in Washington state?
4. In what areas do we still need more information to move this committee's work forward?
5. Are there findings that do not align with your experience? If so, what is the difference?
labeling standards are adhered to and can break down
I don't think that we are looking at the goal holistically. we are too focused on composting food waste versus preventing
Who determines clean and marketable finished compost
what does environmentally sustainable mean? what metrics?
Are we looking at carbon footprint impact on hauling food waste all over the state
State has goal - but jurisdictions have various methods/ facilitaties - make sure accessibility and policy are aligned. and policy packaging reflects this!
HB1799 is nudging use in a positive direction in how we deal with organic waste, and has set things in motion
Life cycle analysis - really looking at environmental outcomes
Need to have a balance - you will always need separate route trucks.
LCAs - just one part of the puzzle. Usually does not take everything into consideration - some data still being developed
LCA perespective. what are the real environental outcomes?
How many additional composting facilities do we need and how soon?
The gap between compostable product standards (time to compost) versus the throughput time many composter use/ employ
What additional feedstocks will we have to add with the food waste
What is the best kind of preventative education? Who do we have to reach and how?
Is it easier/ more effective to educate businesses or households?
Facilities - where is the time for them to do research? Capacity and funding is needed - is this happening?
A lot is not working (contamination, consumer confusion) and this leads to contamination.
Not all field tests are completed to determine these times
where will all of this funding come from- when do the rate payers become informed
What would it look like to ban all single use plastic? So there was only compostable service-ware? Or vice versa?
Lab tests isolate items, but real world conditions utilize more micro-orgs.
Gap: Lack of a home compostability standard
Consumer confusion not just on what is compostable or not but what is compostable vs recyclable or neither
Do we need to consider TUV as a standard?
Instead of considering compostable products should we consider a ban on these products?
Barriers: jurisdictional inconsistency. Residents need more consistency in "accepted" items.
Opportunity to dispel assumptions about product types and create a solid foundation for law making
Will regulators make it easier for new/existing facilities to get permitted, or have capacities
Barrier = enforcement of blocking sales. Online retailers will be a challenge.
Difference in composting process changes the breakdown period needed for different products
Consumer confusion - with lack of consistency across the state.
Understand where/why composting is working well
Local governments need funding for enforcement.
Fix the "wood substrate" vs ASTM gap in 1799 Sec. 8
Facilities - where is the time for them to do research? Capacity and funding is needed - is this happening?
It would be beneficial to test overs and final compost at facilities for current levels of contamination - what is the difference in product of facilities that take materials vs those who don't. Does it impact marketability?
Do compostable products actually reduce GHG emissions? (With the additional captured food?)
Ensuring compostable standards work and are applicable for WA facilities. Which standards are field tested with methods used by WA facilities
Do we need to learn more about eastside/westside compost facilities and abilities (dry side/wet sides of the state?
do compostable products add any value to the compost
How much food waste is actually diverted through the use of compostables? Which product are most effective?
Toxicity of Compostable products
How will composters avoid being implicitly "penalized" for accepting compostables, when some contamination is inevitable.
How do compostables compare with recyclable products? LCA?
Compostability standards / lab results not matching filed tests or on the ground experience at Washington facilities
Where folks are choosing to go with CMA versus ASTM through BPI