

Cornell Atkinson Topical Lunch:

Title: *Upcycling Food Waste*

Hosts/Organizers: Lori Leonard, Development Sociology,
Ruth Richardson, Civil and Environmental Engineering

Date: Thursday, October 3, 2019, 12:00 PM

Location: 300 Rice Hall

Abstract: In Spring 2019, the New York State legislature passed the Food Donation and Food Scrap Recycling Act, making the state one of six in the country to have enacted organics diversion bills. The Act requires most large-volume producers of food waste, including colleges, supermarkets, correctional facilities, and large restaurants, to have donation and recycling plans in place by January 2022. The New York Department of Environmental Conservation estimates that the Act will keep up to 250,000 tons of food out of landfills each year. Currently, food makes up about 18 percent of the solid waste stream. In New York, most of this is trucked to neighboring states where it is landfilled, producing methane as it breaks down. The Act codifies the EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy in that it requires producers to separate out food for donation, to report on the amount of food donated, and to recycle food scraps if there is appropriate infrastructure – such as an anaerobic digester or a composting facility – within 25 miles. This is therefore a propitious time to be examining how to make the best use of existing organics recycling infrastructure, including wastewater treatment plants. This topical lunch aims to bring together some of these large-volume producers of food and organic waste to discuss the possibilities and challenges of using food and other organic materials for energy production via local wastewater treatment plants. The aims of the topical lunch are two-fold:

1) to assemble high-volume producers of organic waste, staff of the local wastewater treatment facility, and organics haulers to meet each other and discuss current capacities, practices and challenges related to anaerobic digestion; and
2) to solicit input from this group about the proposed content of a half-day workshop to be held later in the year with an expanded group of potential waste producers and recyclers. Below are some probing questions we will be discussing over lunch:

- What are the infrastructural challenges associated with upcycling food scraps and other food waste? And how are these best addressed?
- Are there unique or special challenges associated with the use of waste from different types of providers (restaurants, schools, etc.)? If so, what are they?
- What other (non-infrastructural) challenges exist to the implementation of large-scale food waste recycling?
- What are the most pressing priorities for action, given the implementation timeline for the organics recycling bill?