

Texas State University, Bobcat Blend

TEEA 2013 Winner: Education



In 2009, Texas State University students received a grant to study whether composting can be used to effectively destroy invasive water hyacinth and create nutrient-rich compost for application in agricultural and horticultural industries.

Students were not only successful in demonstrating that this invasive species can be used as a primary feedstock to create compost within accepted industry quality standards, but have since conducted additional research at their composting facility on water lettuce, hydrilla, and Georgia Cane. Current research addresses wild taro from the San Marcos River and brown seaweed from the Texas Gulf Coast. In one research project, students created 90 yards of compost worth \$2,500 from: 20,300 pounds of invasive water hyacinth, water lettuce, and hydrilla plants; 52,200 pounds of woodchips from a local tree service company; and 45,000 pounds of campus food waste.

Bobcat Blend students are not afraid to get their hands dirty. On top of conducting research, student activities diverted 57 tons of organic waste from the landfill last year and reduced university costs and fuel usage through fewer waste hauls. A portion of the generated compost is used in outdoor classrooms and on campus landscapes while Bobcat Blend sells the remainder to community gardens. This is all accomplished by dedicated students collecting pre- and post-consumer waste daily from all five dining halls and other campus locations and hauling it to their 5-acre offsite compost facility for integration into established piles. These motivated students find additional strategies to save money and make an impact by coming up with new ideas and improvements, such as acquiring a grant-funded pedicab for hauling food waste and expanding research to include vermicomposting.

Students participating in the Bobcat Blend project also provide education on and off campus. Students continually evaluate collection rates and look at ways to boost participation, such as testing

the benefits of 3-D signage with clearer sorting instructions to dressing up as referees and blowing the whistle on students who throw trash in composting bins. Last year, students took their educational efforts off campus, initiating a grant-funded composting program at San Marcos High School to encourage composting by the students.

Projects such as Bobcat Blend not only provide valuable research and serve as a model for successful large-scale composting, but create leaders in the continually evolving and growing waste-management industry.