



Empowering Rural Communities: Models of Success in Waste Reduction & Sustainability



With solid waste facility capacity shrinking across the Northeast, landfill space is running out—and tipping fees and transportation costs are climbing fast. In this shifting landscape, strategies such as wasted food prevention, donation, anaerobic digestion, animal feed, and composting offer rural communities important alternatives to traditional waste disposal. This compilation of stories highlights successful technical assistance models from CET's Waste Reduction Consultants, specifically designed for rural communities.

Strategies include donating edible food, reducing waste, recovering valuable resources, and diverting materials from landfills to foster sustainable and efficient operations. Throughout this compilation, we will explore the journeys of three rural communities that have made significant strides in sustainability with the help of CET's no-cost assistance. This work, funded by the USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS), enables CET to partner with businesses and sustainability committees to implement successful strategies.

Kearsarge, New Hampshire

Kearsarge Climate Action Group & CET's Partnership for Waste Reduction & Community Sustainability

Focusing on energy and waste reduction, the New Hampshire Kearsarge Climate Action (KCA) group supports programs that help its local region minimize their environmental footprint. KCA is dedicated to creating sustainable solutions and collaborating with local organizations to promote waste reduction practices. KCA's initiatives range from educational workshops to direct support for businesses and individuals looking to create positive environmental change.



KCA is a pivotal partner in supporting the work of CET, an environmental nonprofit that offers resilient climate solutions for people and businesses. [CET](#) offers free technical assistance through funding by the USDA Rural Utilities Services in eligible areas like the Kearsarge region. CET has assisted businesses to adopt waste management strategies that diverted over 130 tons of wasted food in New Hampshire. The combined outreach efforts of KCA and CET have allowed CET to work with over 10 businesses in the Kearsarge region.

Community engagement is central to KCA's mission, and their partnership with their weekly paper, Kearsarge Shopper, played a crucial role in expanding CET's reach. Through a targeted advertisement in the Shopper, KCA and CET are raising awareness about the free services available

to businesses in the region. KCA's utilization of local media outlets and vast knowledge of businesses that desire sustainable change created an effective pathway for CET to assist businesses. By amplifying CET's reach in NH, KCA is helping to create a more resilient and environmentally conscious community.

A highlight of this partnership is the technical assistance CET provided to [Blue Loon Bakery](#), made possible through KCA's outreach support. At the bakery, CET assessed their waste streams and recommended outlets like Too Good To Go to help divert surplus food. Additionally, CET provided free, customized signage to meet the specific needs of the bakery's waste program to improve material separation. Blue Loon Bakery now diverts over 2.5 tons of materials from the landfill annually.



Congratulations to these local businesses for reducing waste!

- Baker Hill Golf Club
- Berkshire Roots
- Blue Loon Bakery
- Bubbas Bar and Grille
- Colby-Sawyer College
- The Flying Goose
- Grounds
- Hannaford
- Hopewell Farm
- Mount Sunapee Resort
- Sweet Beet Farm, Market, & Cafe
- Woodcrest Village Assisted Living

The collaboration between CET & Kearsarge Climate Action provides guidance to local businesses to reduce wasted food that would otherwise go to landfill.

Contact CET at cetonline.org or (413) 586-7350 to meet with a waste reduction expert at no cost to you.

KCA also facilitated CET's connection with the [Hannaford Supermarket](#) in New London where they are supporting an ongoing initiative to redirect food to food banks, pig farms, and anaerobic digesters. Furthermore, CET provided compost site assistance to two farms in the region to help enhance operations and expand their capacity to process food scraps.

To learn more about the New Hampshire Kearsarge Climate Action, visit its [Facebook page](#) and explore its sustainability initiatives.

Mansfield, Connecticut

A Community in Action

The Town of Mansfield is a rural community in Tolland County, Connecticut with a population of about 25,000 residents, and has exemplified a broad commitment to building a sustainable community for years. Bringing residents together for accessible, sustainable initiatives in their local spaces has fostered a sense of community, empowered collective action, and encouraged creating a more resilient future. The Mansfield Recycling Coordinator and the volunteers serving on the Mansfield Solid Waste Advisory Committee have been leading the drive to reduce waste within the town.

Vital locations for quick waste disposal and recycling collection, transfer stations can be seen as the “go-between” in the waste management process and have the misconception that they can't play a role in sustainability. However, the [Mansfield Transfer Station](#) is dispelling those myths and taking steps toward a more sustainable future for its residents. Composting wasted food, stressing the importance of reusing appliances, and salvaging deconstruction materials are just some initiatives in place, serving as an active and innovative player in sustainability in the Town of Mansfield.

On an average day, residents can compost their food scraps in the leaf pile and browse for free household items and electronics. The popular Swap Shop, housed in a transfer station building, is where residents can donate small appliances and household items to be used by the local community instead of being sent to disposal. Last year, an electronics reuse area was added at the transfer station for residents to drop off working gadgets. The Transfer Station has been collecting electronics since the 1990s to recycle valuable materials, but why recycle electronics when they can have a second life?



Launched in spring 2025, Mansfield's Deconstruction Collection Pilot is a unique project aimed at reducing construction and demolition waste by salvaging usable building materials. The pilot is a partnership between the Town, [the ReCONNstruction Center](#), and building contractors. A 20-foot shipping container is housed at the transfer station to store used construction materials. During a construction or demolition project, participating contractors can donate pre-approved materials avoiding the cost of disposal. These items are stored in the shipping container until the container is full. The ReCONNstruction Center will collect the previously vetted materials and process them for resale at their reuse store in New Britain CT. The ReCONNstruction Center is a used building materials store committed to providing affordable materials to the local community while diverting these good materials from landfills. Through grant funding from USDA Rural Utilities Services, CET helped the Mansfield Recycling Coordinator locate an end-market for collected materials and create standard operating procedures for the program.

The transfer station is not the only place where reuse is valued. The Mansfield Recycling Coordinator, Virginia Walton, has been organizing a quarterly repair café since 2014, where people from near and far gather to participate in this sustainability initiative. These events focus on repairing clothing, electrical items, small furniture and even sharpen dull knives and tools, extending the life of everyday items and preventing them from ending up as trash.



The Town's commitment to building a sustainable community is evident in the public schools. Aside from composting wasted food at their K-8 public school since the mid-1990s, the schools are now preventing leftovers from ending up in the compost. The elementary, middle and high schools of Mansfield started donating leftovers to the local soup kitchen in 2023. In the first year over 4 tons of edible food fed their neighbors in need. This program is loved by the school food service staff, the volunteers picking up and delivering the food, and the Covenant Soup Kitchen. Riding on the success of school food rescue, Mansfield recently expanded their effort to include restaurants and catering food rescue. The Mansfield Recycling Coordinator sought out more volunteers and asked CET to design an outreach rack card for catered events. The rack card explains how catered events can participate in donating surplus food through this food rescue program.

It takes dedication to make an impact on the local community. The Mansfield Recycling Coordinator and the volunteers serving on the Mansfield Solid Waste Advisory Committee have been the driving force of waste reduction within town. Their efforts, however, would be wasted if not for the support of the Mansfield Town Council. While most of the programs are budget-friendly, relying on volunteer engagement, the startup costs and infrastructure are covered through the Mansfield Solid Waste Enterprise Fund, which is solely supported by trash user fees. Mansfield operates as a "pay-as-you-throw" community, meaning residents pay based on how much trash they dispose of. This incentivizes waste reduction and helps fund both collection services and sustainable programs, such as composting, electronics reuse, and more. Other rural communities can learn a lot from Mansfield's approach—by combining local volunteer efforts, smart funding models, and strong community involvement, they too can create impactful, low-cost waste reduction programs that are both effective and sustainable. To learn more about Mansfield's programs, [visit their website](#).



Scituate, Rhode Island

Setting a Model for Sustainability Through Community Initiatives & Waste Tracking

The Town of Scituate, RI, with a population of over 10,000, is strategically advocating for sustainability by leveraging data and successful initiatives to drive change across multiple areas. With North Scituate Elementary leading the charge in waste reduction strategies and the Scituate Art Festival embracing sustainable practices, these efforts demonstrate how sustainability, community, and creativity can go hand-in-hand to build a brighter, more sustainable future. The driving force behind these efforts is the Scituate Sustainability Committee, which is focused on providing accessible sustainability education and providing tools to create eco-friendly programs to foster long-term environmental change for this rural community.

The Art Festival is a major three-day community event in Scituate and provides a unique opportunity for the committee to push for sustainability on a larger scale. Understanding the environmental impact of large gatherings, the committee looked for opportunities to reduce the event's overall waste. In 2023, the committee reached out to CET for additional support with their sustainability efforts at the Art Festival, seeking assistance based on our work with the school. In the first year, the committee conducted a basic waste characterization study, collecting sample bags over the course of the 3-day event to sort wasted food, trash, and recyclables. This helped them assess the event's waste streams and identify areas for improvement. This data collection laid the groundwork for advocating more sustainable practices for future events. The findings were shared with the Art Festival Committee, and they started brainstorming how they could make the following years more environmentally conscious.

In 2024, Scituate's sustainability efforts gained significant momentum in their second year. The Scituate Sustainability Committee reconvened with CET to gather feedback and brainstorm ideas for what year two could bring. The committee successfully secured funding for a composting program with [Epic Renewal](#), which focused on back-of-house food scrap collection. Working directly with food vendors, they provided instruction on which materials were acceptable for composting and recycling. A list of materials and information about local recycling options was also handed out to vendors. To further streamline waste management, the committee worked with [Scituate Public Works Department](#) to ensure recycling and trash bins throughout the festival were paired and labeled for easy use by attendees. Additionally, the committee facilitated the diversion of film plastic collected from vendors by partnering with a local business to recycle this material.

The Scituate Sustainability Committee also assisted in incorporating sustainable practices at North Scituate Elementary School. The committee reached out to CET for assistance in offering no-cost technical support to the school. The school already had various wasted food diversion initiatives including a Share Table for food redistribution, a cafeteria sorting station, and a milk carton recycling program. The cafeteria sorting process relies heavily on student participation, serving as an important tool for educating the younger population. Through recommendations from CET, the school improved its waste management system, adjusting bin setups and signage to reduce contamination, and connected with a local farmer interested in collecting the diverted food scraps to feed his animals. With these practices in place, it is estimated that the school diverts around 4 tons of food scraps each year. To read more information about the school's waste reduction initiative and CET's involvement, please read [this spotlight](#).

Scituate's efforts in both the Art Festival and North Scituate Elementary School are a great step forward to a more sustainable future. These initiatives have not only set an example for other rural communities but have also fostered a culture of sustainability within its own. Success in this town emphasizes how sustainability can be achievable in any community, big or small. Learn more about Town of Scituate's programs on its [website](#) and [Facebook page](#).



Kearsarge, Mansfield, and Scituate showcase that with the right support, rural communities can successfully adopt waste reduction strategies, leading to significant environmental benefits. By leveraging CET's no-cost technical assistance, these towns demonstrate how tailored approaches—such as wasted food diversion, composting, deconstruction material reuse, and sustainable event planning—create measurable impacts. Their success stories highlight the importance of partnerships, community engagement, and innovative solutions in addressing waste challenges. Together, these efforts pave the way for rural communities to adopt similar strategies, fostering resilience, sustainability, and a collective commitment to reducing landfill dependency.

If your school, business, or institution would like to implement waste reduction programs, contact the CET hotline for assistance at (888) 813-8552, cetonline.org, or wastedfood@cetonline.org.

