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**Coalition calls for “compost revolution” to avert looming waste crisis**

A group of leading experts including horticulturists, academics, retailers, trade associations and charities1 are today calling for a radical rethink of how we handle organic waste in the UK.

UK households produce a staggering 14 million tonnes of food and green waste every year. An estimated 2 million more tonnes will need to be processed by local authorities when new anticipated mandatory food waste collections start in 2024. However, the experts warn a crisis is on the horizon unless urgent action is taken to tackle contamination and infrastructure issues.

Enrich the Earth, a new movement of diverse organisations including the National Trust, RHS, Suez and the Horticultural Trade Association, today launch a manifesto calling for an urgent “compost revolution” to galvanise the public and achieve two clear goals:

* To increase the proportion of households composting at home from 33% to 50% 2 - this would prevent 1,000,0003 tonnes of waste needing to be processed by local authorities each year.
* To decrease levels of contamination in our garden and food waste bins - this is reaching 20% in some areas and significantly reduces the potential of the material to be used on farms and in people’s gardens. The UK organics recycling sector incurs annual costs of around £50M due to removal and disposal of over 350,000 tonnes of plastic.4

The document identifies several issues that need addressing:

* The UK currently doesn’t have enough facilities in the right places, close to the source, to process this material. Food waste is heavy and of low value - transporting it long distances is costly and has a high environmental impact.
* Massive investment is needed to build anaerobic digesters across the country, but this won’t happen until the legislation is passed and this will take time, with no clear plan as to what will happen in the meantime.
* Without urgently addressing contamination levels there is a risk the extra 2 million tonnes of food waste collected is worthless and an environmental burden.
* At the same time, we urgently need to find sustainable alternatives to the 965,000 cubic meters5 of peat used in horticulture every year. Organic waste might be able to replace up to 30% of the peat used – however this is only possible if contamination is reduced.

A ground-breaking trial, the first of its kind at this scale, launches in the North East today and aims to maximise the value of compost from green waste collected from households across the region. Garden centres, community gardening groups, restaurants and universities will also be involved in a concerted effort to compost garden waste and non-animal byproduct food scraps more, use wormeries and reduce contamination in organic waste collections. Learnings will be openly shared with the aim of rolling out the trial across the country.

Ben Allison, a farmer in Durham has been using compost on his farm sourced from his local authority composting facility for years and is benefiting from Durham County Council’s efforts to reduce contamination*. “The quality of the compost from our local council has really improved over recent years. I successfully use it to grow many arable crops. The compost provides an injection of organic matter into the soils whilst also having nutritional benefit. I think all farms should use local green compost as it’s not only helping fight climate change, but it also reduces the need for synthetic fertilisers which have become very expensive as a result of the war in the Ukraine. As a farmer growing crops, my soil is my bank account, using green compost helps to guarantee a plentiful harvest.”*

As the UK moves away from using peat, the gardening industry will need to find a range of different materials which are more sustainable, affordable and equally effective as a growing media. One of the replacement materials could be organic waste and the learnings from the North East trial will help highlight what new steps are needed and demonstrate what is feasible and beneficial.

Enrich the Earth has been brought together by new environmental innovator Sizzle. **Founder of Sizzle Trewin Restorick said:** “*The introduction of mandatory food collections is welcome but it’s a waste of time if there is no clear plan from government as to what will happen with the waste collected. Radical systemic change is needed and so is a focus on making better use of our waste at home. Composting our grass and hedge clippings and fruit and veg scraps is a great place to start and it’s an immediate step we can all take to fight climate change and enrich our soil.*

*According to the 2021 Census, almost nine in ten people have access to a garden in the UK but our polling suggests only a third of us make our own compost2, so we believe there is a huge opportunity here.  We’re especially keen for “reluctant” composters to have a go for the first time – it’s surprisingly easy, you get nutrient-rich gold for your garden and it’s free!”*

**Prof Alistair Griffiths, Director of Science & Collections at RHS said: “***The RHS is excited to be part of this project which aims to help towards reversing the climate and biodiversity crises. Peatlands store twice the amount of carbon than all the land on earth and can store this carbon for thousands of years. Peatlands are home to unique wildlife and act like big sponges to reduce flash flooding during extreme weather events - linked to climate change.*

*The Royal Horticultural Society is already 98% peat free and aims to be 100% peat free, including propagation, retail and shows by the end of 2025. The RHS composts all its green waste and uses it to make its gardens bloom.*

*“Composting is a great way to empower gardeners to take climate positive actions to help tackle the climate crisis. If every gardener gets composting, they will free up key peat-free materials (bark, coir and wood fibre) for the horticulture industry. This in turn helps industry to accelerate their transition to peat free so our nation can grow and enjoy healthy peat free plants.”*

**Andrew Jasper, Director of Gardens and Parklands at the National Trust said:** *“The National Trust has been gardening peat-free for over 20 years and producing great compost from waste products to enrich our garden soils. We strongly support efforts to encourage more people to compost and to clean up green waste and process more food waste. We know there is huge demand for good quality materials to make peat free compost and soil improvers. With climate change putting pressure on plant health, it is more important than ever for us all to enrich soils and mulch newly planted trees and other plants to conserve moisture.”*

**Dr Adam Read, Chief External Affairs and Sustainability Officer at SUEZ Recycling & Recovery UK** **said:***“It’s essential that we see a rapid reduction in the levels of contamination in food and green waste so the compost we make is of better quality and therefore more usable. Organic waste is really valuable when not contaminated with other materials and can be used to enrich the soil on our farms and in our gardens. We're urging the public to be conscientious when throwing things away and check what can and can’t go in their food and green waste bins. It’s common for us to see items such as plastic bottle caps, plastic wrappers and bags but we’ve also seen Christmas decorations, garden gnomes, chairs, buckets and even lawnmowers! Households can play their part by making sure only organic materials go into their garden and food waste - progress only happens when we all do our bit and everyone has a part to play in creating real lasting change for the future of our planet.”*

**Leading environmentalist and horticulturalist Chris Baines**, **a key expert supporting the movement said:** *“There is a lot of confusion about which growing materials to use in our gardens and how best to use them which we’re keen to help address. One thing is clear - by making more compost at home and using it as a soil conditioner and a mulch, we can save the use of peat-free potting composts and materials such as coir and bark so there is enough to go around.”*

**Fiona Taylor, Chief Executive of Garden Organic** said: *Home composting is a no brainer in any size growing space; not only does it turn waste material into precious, free, soil improver it also requires no polluting transportation and no single-use plastic packaging. What’s more, it’s a valuable ingredient for growers wanting to make their own peat-free compost mixes. Through our Master Composter volunteer programme, Garden Organic has been helping growers successfully compost their green waste for nearly 25 years, along with supporting people to transition to peat-free growing by providing simple, practical, tried and tested advice. We’re excited to be part of this innovative coalition and look forward to working with partners to promote sustainable growing practices.*

*- Ends-*

**Notes to editors**

**1 Enrich the Earth** is a movement of diverse organisations committed to getting the most value from green and unavoidable food waste to cut carbon emissions, build a circular economy and reduce costs.

These organisations include **National Trust, RHS, Suez, Horticultural Trade Association, NIAB, ADAS, Chris Baines Associates, Carbon Clarity, Garden Organic, REA, Caledonian Horticulture, Our Natural World, Garden Centre Association, Growing Media Assocation, CIWM, Southern Trident and SJB Quality Consulting Ltd**

Enrich the Earth has been created by a new Community Interest Company called Sizzle Innovation (www.sizzle.org.uk) and is independently funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation which exists to improve our natural world.

2 Censuswide surveyed a nationally representative sample of over 2,000 adult UK residents in May 2023 about their composting habits. More data is available on request.

3 Enrich the Earth Manifesto 2023 – calculations available on request

4 In 2021 the REA published its annual report (REview22) where data showed almost 7% of the inbound material for composting was contamination, that’s roughly 350,000 Tonnes. This equates to over £50M in costs for disposal via landfill.

5 HTA Growing Media Monitor Report 2022

**About Sizzle**

Sizzle is a Community Interest Company founded by Trewin Restorick following his departure as CEO and co-founder of environmental charity Hubbub. Sizzle’s ambition is to rethink the way that products and services are delivered to radically reduce environmental impact whilst being affordable, high quality and financially viable.

Sizzle is intent on getting to grips with the everyday challenges that make living sustainably complex, expensive and inconvenient creating bold solutions built on insight, innovation, collaboration, and expert guidance.

<https://www.sizzle.org.uk/>

**About Esmée Fairburn Foundation**

Founded in 1961, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation is one of the UK’s largest independent funders.

In 2021, we provided £51.6m in grant funding towards a wide range of work in support of our three main aims: to improve Our Natural World, secure A Fairer Future and nurture Creative, Confident Communities.

We aim to improve our natural world, secure a fairer future and strengthen the bonds in communities in the UK. We do this by contributing all that we can to unlock change by people and organisations with brilliant ideas who share our goals.

<https://esmeefairbairn.org.uk/>