Compost as an On Farm Conservation Practice

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the US Department of Agriculture’s primary conservation agency. Their mission is to “deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.” USDA and NRCS have identified compost application as a conservation practice that aids in both carbon sequestration and nutrient management.

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD SOIL CARBON AMENDMENT CODE 336

Purpose
This practice is used to accomplish one or more of the following purposes:
- Improve or maintain soil organic matter
- Sequester carbon and enhance soil carbon (C) stocks
- Improve soil aggregate stability
- Improve habitat for soil organisms

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT CODE 590

Purpose
This practice is used to accomplish one or more of the following purposes:
- Improve plant health and productivity
- Reduce excess nutrients in surface and groundwater
- Reduce emissions of objectionable odors
- Reduce emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors
- Reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses (GHG)
- Reduce emissions of ozone precursors
- Reduce the risk of potential pathogens from manure, biosolids, or compost application from reaching surface and groundwater
- Improve or maintain soil organic matter

Through flagship programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Innovation Grants, and the Conservation Stewardship Program, USDA is incentivizing farmers and ranchers to use more compost. Meanwhile, in response to the growing need for organics diversion around the country, the US is experiencing an expansion in its composting infrastructure, and with continued support, will be poised to meet the demands of regenerative agriculture at scale.