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## Compost facility turns trash into treasure

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Waste may arguably be the most unavoidable, undesirable and destructive bi-product of life. Frustrating to most, waste brings pollution and devaluation to any environment.

Ecological survival depends on how well people respond to that waste which continuously piles up around them.

On Feb. 22, Joint Base Lewis-McChord sold at auction what is being called the largest pile of compost ever sold through the government's surplus liquidation site.

"We sold about 1,000 yards (approximately 5,076,000 pounds) of high-quality compost for approximately \$9,000," Ken Smith, JBLM Directorate of Public Works Environmental Operations Branch chief, said. Smith said JBLM has been composting nearly 4,000 yards a year at the Earthworks composting facility.

JBLM recycled a total net profit of approximately \$2.5 million in 2011, Smith said. These dollars are redirected to Family, Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs.

A 2005 solid waste characterization survey showed that approximately 41 percent of the then-Fort Lewis waste stream was organic in nature and could be reclaimed and composted. Organic waste consists of leaves, grass, landscaping and land-clearing debris, stable waste, food waste and sewage sludge.

Since 2006 the JBLM Earthworks compost facility has been turning organic waste resources into valuable landscaping and soil enhancement products. This has either been used on JBLM or sold by the Qualified Recycling Program to private buyers in the local community.

For going above and beyond to remain environmentally and financially responsible, JBLM is enjoying a relative pot of gold at the end of the composting rainbow.

As directed by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations, Energy and Environment, JBLM has been a pilot installation of the Army's Net Zero Initiative since 2006.

The Net Zero Initiative is the Army's environmentally-conscious force multiplier with goals that address energy, water and waste issues. Smith said the initiative also helps to show the public that (the Army) continues to be resourceful with their tax dollars.

"The public's general consensus of the military and the government seems to be that it wastes money, but the truth is that we're taking waste products and turning it into a viable commodity," Jeremy Becker, senior science technician and Earthworks facility manager, said. "We're doing good things here; we're making dollars and sense."

Through coordinated collection efforts with the contracted refuse and recycling service provider, organic waste is redirected to Earthworks from facilities on base such as dining facilities, restaurants, child care centers and fast food chains. By processing and composting its own organic waste, JBLM saves the money it would have spent on landfill disposal or recycling facility tipping fee costs.

In 2011 the Earthworks facility doubled its operational areas in an effort to meet JBLM's present and future needs and to work toward the Army's vision of "Net Zero Waste by 2020."

The most exciting part of the whole process is looking at what's to come, Smith said.

“We plan to add the McChord side of JBLM to the equation in June,” he said.

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