

Montana State University

Office of Sustainability



July - December Zero Waste Progress Report FY 2025-2026



Contents

Six Month Year to Year Comparisons ... 3

Project Updates and Progress 5

Looking Ahead 7



Introduction

To support Annual Reporting on Zero Waste metrics at Montana State University, the Office of Sustainability recognizes the importance of celebrating progress. This progress report will serve as a way to communicate year-to-year comparisons to the campus community comparing Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 to FY 2026 for the months July - December. All progress is continually rooted in MSU's Six Zero Waste Strategies found below.

Support Campus Collaboration to Achieve Zero Waste

Increased Education, Outreach, and Visibility

Supporting Growth of Infrastructure Across Campus

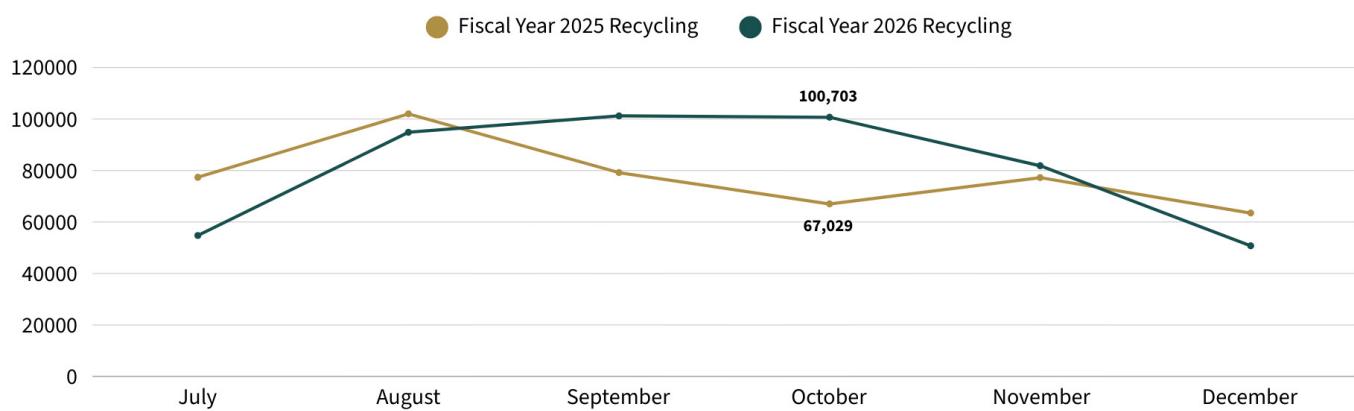
Supporting Sustainable Purchasing

Support Student Interns & Projects

Centralized Data Tracking

Year to Year Comparisons July - December

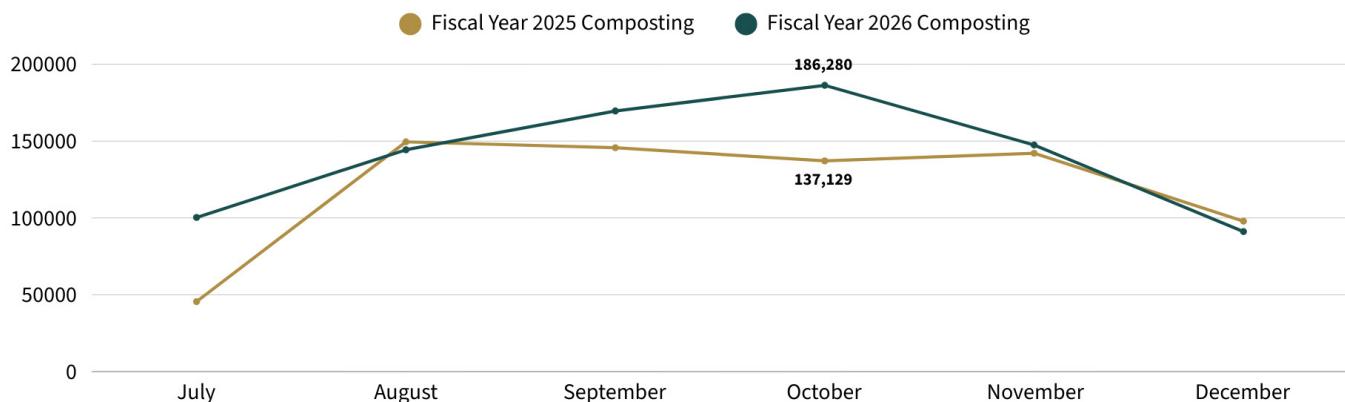
Recycling Monthly Totals



Recycling totals over a sixth month period saw a **17,860 pound increase** in FY 26, as compared to FY 25. The highest monthly total eclipsed 100,00 pounds in October, while FY 25's October total of 67,029 pounds was the lowest of the six month period. From FY 25 October to FY 26 October, the monthly increase was 33,674 pounds. These increases could reflect the increased collaboration between Facilities Services and the Office of Sustainability. Projects such as Move-in 2025 and an targeted outreach campaigns to reduce contamination are examples of positive recycling impacts.

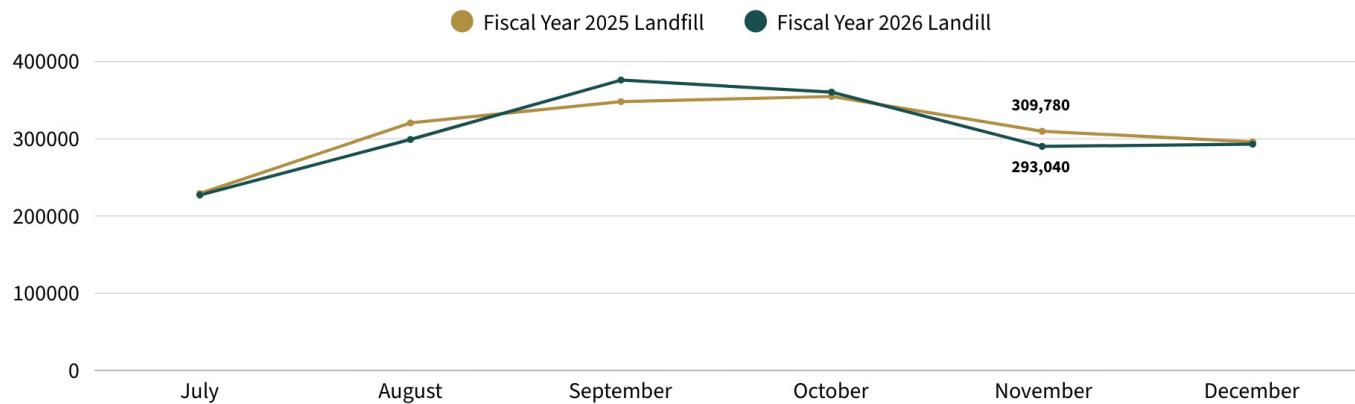
Year to Year Comparisons July - December

Composting Monthly Totals



Composting totals over a sixth month period saw a **26,084 pound increase** in FY 26, as compared to FY 25. The highest monthly total eclipsed 186,280 pounds in October, while FY 25's October total reached 137,129 pounds. From FY25 October to FY 26 October, the monthly increase was 49,151 pounds. These increases could reflect the increased collaboration between Culinary Services and the Office of Sustainability. Continued support and enthusiasm from Happy Trash Can Composting allowed for the ease in increase of compostable material leaving campus. Projects such as compost expansion across campus and a focus on hosting Zero Waste Events, all lead to a positive compost impact.

Landfill Monthly Totals



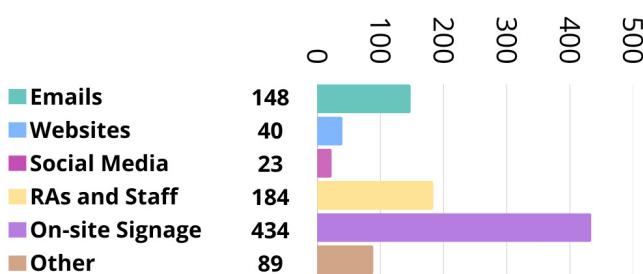
Landfill totals over a sixth month period saw a **12,414 pound decrease** in FY 26, as compared to FY 25. November FY 26's totals reached 293,040 pounds, while FY 25's October total reached 309,780 pounds. From FY25 November to FY 26 November, the monthly decrease was 16,740 pounds. These decreases could reflect the increased collaboration between Facilities Services and the Office of Sustainability. Continued support and enthusiasm for the reduction of landfill across campus is seen through purchasing decisions and more. The six month average diversion rate rose **2.5 percent** in FY 26 as compared to FY 25 diversion rate percentages. To increase a reduction in landfill waste, sustainable purchasing and the reuse of hard goods becomes an imperative choice for purchasers across campus. Continuing to inspire and increase recycling/composting infrastructure will lead to more access for users to make positive environmental decisions.

Project Success Stories

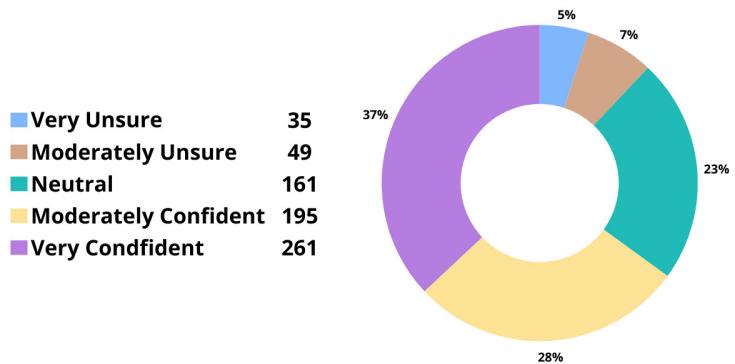
Sustainable Move In

Fall 2025 (FY2026) Move-In marked a strong, sustainable start to the year, driven by partnerships with Housing, Auxiliaries, and Facilities. Clear communication, improved recycling signage, and added cardboard roll-offs ensured proper sorting and achieved zero cardboard contamination in the month of August. The Office of Sustainability equipped RAs and volunteers with best practices, who then guided students and families during move-in. As a result, **August trash decreased by 21,000 pounds compared to FY 2025**. A follow-up survey shared by University Housing that was sent to students and families showed very positive feedback and high confidence in recycling. **Graph One on the left** asked participants where they viewed or received recycling information **during move in**. **Graph Two on the right** asked participants how confident they felt in sorting materials. The collaboration and partnerships between the Office of Sustainability, University Housing, Facilities Services, and Auxiliary Services highlights how coordinated outreach can deliver measurable waste reductions.

Graph One: Recycling Information Streams



Graph Two: Confidence in Sorting Materials

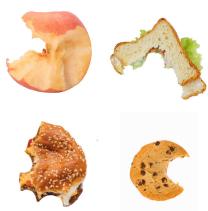


COMPOST THESE ITEMS

Containers & Utensils



Food Scraps



AND

Increasing Composting on Campus

Campus composting expanded significantly this year through more building participation and onsite composting at major events like **Freshman First Meal, JABS Networking Night, and the RMA Conference**. Composting collection is expanding in areas including Herrick Hall, Marsh Lab, and the SUB (Strand Union Building). Strong communication, clear signage, and partnerships with Facilities, Catering, and Happy Trashcan supported this work. Project success is reflected in a 90% or more diversion rate at each of the events listed above over the past semester and consistently low contamination. These projects were a success through Zero Waste intern support, effective educational tools, and engaged campus partners.

Project Success Stories Continued

Zero waste fall 2025 interns

Two Zero Waste interns played a key role in advancing diversion rates and zero waste initiatives across campus through a variety of hands-on, project-based efforts. Their work focused on **increasing recycling** access in residence halls by placing recycling bins in each room of older dorms, as well as **expanding composting** through signage design and coordination with Facilities and Culinary Services in high-impact locations such as the SUB, Herrick Hall, and Marsh Lab. The interns also supported zero waste events by “chaperoning” trash, recycling, and compost stations at programs like the JABS Sustainable Networking Night and the RMA Dinner, ensuring proper disposal and education in real time. These efforts directly contributed to meeting **90% diversion rate goals** at supported events and strengthening campus-wide zero waste practices.



Recycling Expansion

Multistream recycling in office spaces expanded this year within the **Bracken Center at JABS and the Student Wellness Center offices**, alongside an increase in single-stream recycling access in the **Johnstone residence halls**. Specifically, the Bracken Center currently has a **80% diversion rate**. These efforts were supported through the strategic placement of new bins and the use of clear, effective signage to guide proper sorting.

Strong partnerships with Housing, Facilities, and engaged staff members helped ensure successful implementation and consistent use. The success of these projects is demonstrated by **increased overall recycling totals and a corresponding decrease in trash weight**, reflecting continued progress toward campus waste reduction goals.

Looking Ahead

Going forward, the short term focus will center on several key areas. Priority will be placed on building a community of MSU members committed to Zero Waste, beginning with individual office spaces and expanding composting and multi-stream recycling opportunities. Additional emphasis will be directed toward collaboration with campus partners on large-scale initiatives, including move-in/out operations and enhancements to larger scale composting infrastructure. Attention will also be given to inspiring and reinforcing positive purchasing decisions across campus. Collectively, these efforts will strengthen MSU's culture of sustainability and advance long-term Zero Waste goals.

A Thank You to Our Campus Partners

Thank you to all campus partners we have worked with and will continue to work with to inspire change. From pilot projects to expanding existing programming, our work is strengthened every day by every part of MSU's community.

A Call for any and all Sustainability Ideas

A few Bobcats started campus recycling in 2009, paving the way for the Office of Sustainability in 2012. A few years later, an eager class showed that dining-hall scraps could build soil instead of landfill methane, composting over 30,000 pounds in their first year. Now, MSU's partnership with Happy Trashcan diverts over 600,000 pounds of compost annually.

Those successes share a common thread: student ideas turned into university action. We want to keep that momentum going, and the best way is to hear directly from you. How to share your sustainability ideas:

Send us an Email – Drop a quick note or full proposal at sustainability@montana.edu

Come See Us! – Meet our team in SUB 284 Monday through Friday

Social Media DM – Want to tag us in a post or story? Find our Instagram [@msusustainable](https://www.instagram.com/msusustainable)

We love any and every suggestion, comment or concern. Even if a concept can't launch immediately, it helps shape future priorities and informs budget requests. This campus is your classroom, let's keep designing it together.

