

MDARD: Digging into Compost Regulations

Compost is an evolving industry which plays an increasingly important role in agriculture, horticulture, and turf industries. To meet the needs of this expanding industry, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) is providing the education below to help producers ensure the quality and safety of Michigan's commodities.

Industry definitions

Manipulated manure means animal or vegetable manure that is ground, pelletized, mechanically dried, packaged, supplemented with plant nutrients or other substances besides phosphorus, or otherwise treated in a manner to assist with the sale or distribution of the manure as a fertilizer or soil or plant additive.

Soil conditioners are any substances used to improve the physical characteristics of soil, including, but not limited to, peat moss and peat products, composted products, synthetic soil conditioners, or other products worked into the soil or applied on the surface to improve the soil properties and enhancing plant growth. Soil conditioner does not include:

- Guaranteed plant nutrients.
- Agricultural liming materials.
- Pesticides.
- Unmanipulated animal or vegetable manures.
- Hormones, bacterial inoculates, or products used to directly influence or control plant growth.

A soil conditioner claiming nutrient value is considered a fertilizer by MDARD.

Fertilizers are any substance containing one or more recognized plant nutrient, used for plant nutrient content, and claiming to have value in promoting plant growth. Fertilizer does not include:

- Unmanipulated animal and vegetable manures.
- Marl.
- Lime.
- Limestone.
- Wood ashes.
- Other materials exempted by rules promulgated under Part 85.

Specialty fertilizers are any fertilizer distributed primarily for non-farm use, such those used for home gardens, lawns, shrubbery, flowers, golf courses, parks, and cemeteries. Specialty fertilizers may include fertilizers used for research or experimental purposes.

Labels include any written, printed, or graphic matter on or attached to packaged fertilizer or used to identify fertilizer distributed in bulk or held in bulk storage. Labeling also includes:

- Advertising
- Sales literature
- Brochures and posters.
- Online, television, and radio announcements.

Fertilizer or Soil Conditioner?

Commercial composting produces a manipulated material. Defined in NREPA Part 115:

"Composting" means a process of biological decomposition of class 1 or class 2 compostable material that meets the following requirements:

- (a) Is carried out by either of the following:
- (i) In a system using vermiculture.
 - (ii) Under controlled aerobic conditions using mechanical handling techniques such as physical turning, windrowing, or aeration or using other management techniques approved by the department. Aerobic conditions may include the presence of insignificant anaerobic zones within the composting material.
- (b) Stabilizes organic fraction into material that can be stored, handled, and used easily, safely, and in an environmentally acceptable manner.

Does the material make nutrient guarantees?

Yes.

No.

Soil conditioner registration required before sale or distribution.

Is the material targeted for commercial agriculture or for non-agricultural (residential, turf, ornamental, garden, etc.)?

Commercial Agriculture only

Facility license required before sale or distribution.

Non-agricultural

Specialty fertilizer registration required before sale or distribution.

Both

Facility license and specialty fertilizer registration required before sale or distribution if the label targets both the agricultural users and specialty (non-ag) users.