

# CRUNCHING COMPOST



**A**ccording to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, yard trimmings and food residuals account for 24 percent of municipal solid wastes nationwide. As communities struggle with diminishing landfill space and farming operations seek lower-cost alternatives to chemical applications, creative entrepreneurs are stepping up and turning suitable organic waste products into compost gold. Kochergen Farms Composting of Avenal, California, is one such company.

## NOT JUST FOR GARDENERS

“Our operation is year-round, 24/7,” explains Eric Espanola, General Manager. “We take in materials from landscapers, homeowners, and 16 different cities and municipalities. We make a variety of products and sell to the agricultural community, biomass fuel plants, nurseries, landscapers, homeowners, and even CalTrans.

“It’s a rock-and-roll show here, just non-stop. We move about 800 tons of product a day. Compost alone we do about 40,000 tons a year.”

Big trees, lawn clippings, brush, C&D, and pallets all make their way to Kochergen. Among the finished products that leave are biomass fuel (a special blend made from brush and grass), compost, and blond wood — a material derived from pallets which DOT uses to line freeways and suppress weeds.

## ROUND THE CLOCK

Wrangling both the raw materials and finished products are Kawasaki loaders, model sizes 70 and 80 (ZIIIIs and ZIVs). Five look like they are battle-scarred with each having racked up at least 15,000 hard-earned hours. Kochergen’s sixth is their newest recruit — an 80ZV-2 equipped with a 7.25-cubic-yard Tink roll-out bucket.

“I started with Kawasaki in 1995 when I worked at Gallo Winery,” says Espanola. “Several years ago, when I teamed up with Mike Kochergen, the owner, to start this composting business, I went back to our local Kawasaki dealer for more.”

Because of the constant activity and the abrasive nature of much of the material fed into the grinders, the loaders take a lot of abuse. They are sitting ducks for anything the grinder decides to kick back out. They navigate over uneven and debris-filled terrain. And their drivers have a distressing but understandable tendency to use the buckets as dozer

blades rather than to lift. But despite the abuse and constant patching, the loaders keep on rolling.

Espanola is an equipment guy. After driving the ZV-2, he noted the improved visibility on the new Dash-2 and the increased horsepower. And he feels the replaceable bushing on the transmission, first available on the ZV Dash-1s and continuing with the Dash-2s, is going to come in very handy. “Our trannies take a beating. If the bushing goes out, it hurts.”

“Our deal is we do or die by the customer. They come first. If we commit, we need to perform.” And he’s got a veteran squad of Kawasaki loaders to make sure that happens.

***Kochergen Farms Composting is serviced by Cen-Cal Machinery, Fresno, California***



***Compost is a 24/7 activity and a Kawasaki 80ZV-2 equipped with a 7.25-cubic-yard Tink roll-out bucket helps move the job along at a rapid pace.***



***Considering that compost can help regenerate poor soils, suppress plant diseases and crop pests, reduce the need for chemical fertilizers, and promote higher crop yields, it’s a no-brainer that California’s giant ag industry clamors for compost.***

