

Waste-Based Economic Development

Working toward Zero Waste includes finding opportunities for community economic development. Instead of burying or burning precious resources, many communities and businesses are discovering the potential of using portions of the wastestream as materials for new businesses and products. This growing field of waste-based economic development “includes businesses that divert ... all types of waste material and add economic value to them through reuse, remanufacturing and recycling.” (*Making Waste Work*, Waste to Work Partnership, April 2002)

Is this a viable economic development strategy? Does waste-based economic development have the potential to create good paying jobs in our communities? According to research conducted by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, the answer is “definitely yes.”

On a per-ton basis, sorting and processing recyclables alone sustain 10 times more jobs than landfilling or incineration. However, making new products from the old offers the largest economic pay-off in the recycling loop. New recycling-based manufacturers employ even more people and at higher wages than does sorting recyclables.

And some types of reuse businesses can generate even higher levels of jobs (see table below).

Each recycling step a community takes locally means more jobs, more business expenditures on supplies and services, and more money circulating in the local economy through spending and tax payments.

