Implementing Incentive Programs to Increase Recycling Participati

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The Problem
Fayetteville considers its residential recycling rate to be approximately 56% (2010); 56% of residences are provided with curbside recycling pickup. According to the EPA the national average is only 34% (2010). However, the town has a much less significant impact when compared with business recycling (3%) and its multiple housing unit project has only recently begun. With Fayetteville’s waste disposal site, the Tontitown landfill, projected to be at maximum capacity within the next five years, the city needs to take advantage of any and all opportunities to increase recycling rates and decrease refuse.

The Project
Research was conducted on an incentive program recently implemented in Mexico City. In 2012, Mexico City, Mexico’s landfill closed after reaching maximum capacity. The closing resulted in improper waste disposal and higher costs to the government as the need to be transported off-site for disposal. The local government was forced to come up with a plan to increase recycling in order to reduce costs, clean up the city and educate its citizens. A weekly “barter market” was developed to work alongside the local farmers market. Local farmers subsidized to grow food and citizens are permitted to bring up to 22 pounds of recyclables per month. Recyclables are traded for vouchers on a per pound basis and are traded for produce and other goods provided by the farmers. Extreme success ensued, as third grade people show up weekly to trade in their recyclables. The city only sees about a 45% return on their investment after subsidiaries are paid, recyclables are hauled away and payment is received. Most cases, returns are seen indirectly through less transportation cost, less refuse, less carbon footprint, and increased community benefit.

Many cities across the world are also using a program called Recyclebank to increase recycling rates. The program works with over 400 businesses to reward recycling with points and then redeem them for coupons and vouchers that can be used to purchase a wide variety of “green” products online. Additionally, these people are able to go on to the Recyclebank website and watch educational clips, take quizzes, take pledges and participate in other environmentally friendly activities to accumulate points. Since 2004 the program has engaged over 3 million people worldwide. Programs such as these increase involvement, promote “green” products, strengthen economies, help people realize the financial benefits of being sustainably driven and educate the public. According to U.S.A today an average household recycles about 80 pounds of household waste a month and therefore has the opportunity to earn around 60 points a month. In total, residents can earn 5,400 points or more per year, worth about $400 in vouchers.

Outcome
In England, two local authorities have implemented Recyclebank and have seen an impressive increase in household recycling. The most recent figures released from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs place the recycling rates in England increased from 41.5% to 43% without Recyclebank - a 1.5% increase. The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead as well as the Halton Borough Council observed a much more significant increase in the amount of waste being sent for recycling since the Recyclebank program has been put into place. Windsor and Maidenhead had more than 7,275,000 pounds of additional household waste sent for recycling, an increase of 12.5% from the previous year. Halton Borough Council in Cheshire also saw a 12.5% increase in household recycling rates per household.

Closer to home, many places across the United States have had success with Recyclebank. Osceola County, near Orlando, Florida, put Recyclebank into place all at the same time they put in their first curbside collection. Within six months over nine million pounds of recycled material had been collected. Also, Hollywood, in Broward County, Florida, recycling rates jumped by 65 percent after putting Recyclebank into action, a Philadelphia suburb saw a 156% increase in recycling rates from the same week the year before. According to the city’s mayor, it program is paid for on a per-household basis. That fee totals about $400 dollars a year. He states however, that the money saved by disposing less garbage in an incinerator or landfill and gaining money from selling the recycled materials offsets this cost. City officials have projected that the city expects to save approximately $2 million over the next five years because they implemented the Recyclebank program.

“Sustainability
If Fayetteville, Arkansas were to implement programs such as Recyclebank or a voucher system to work alongside the local farmers market, it is possible for the city of Fayetteville to increase recycling and the amount of waste being recycled could easily double or even triple in a very short time frame. All those recyclables that can be used to purchase locally grown foods can have a significant impact in many different ways. From an environmental aspect, encouraging recycling keeps large amounts of material out of landfills, off of streets, and out of the natural environment. Offering citizens an incentive to recycle allows the community to recycle and gain more locally grown produce or environmentally friendly made products, can also decrease the amount of refuse associated with transportation.

On average non-local produce travels approximately 1,500 miles from farm to fork versus the less than 40 miles that local produce travels. Additionally, 10% of all fossil fuel consumption is due to food processing, transportation, storage and preparation. Many local farmers also use environmentally friendly practices while farming, decreasing their impact on the environment by using less herbicide, pesticides, petroleum based fertilizers, etc. Thus, increasing the amount of money that is spent by citizens on local produce will help to decrease their carbon footprint. By recycling and reducing the amount of material that goes into the landfill, the city can decrease the amount of money spent by citizens on expensive waste disposal as well as pollution new areas that may otherwise be pristine.

Implementing incentive based programs will have significant effects socially, economically and environmentally. Establishing a program that rewards recyclers with a way to pay for other goods such as bus fare or paying the fine for littering can have about the importance of waste diversion, preserves the local environment and adds to the local economy. In fact, cost savings from recycling programs can easily be outweighed by the benefits produced by selling recycled goods, supporting the local economy, protecting the environment, preventing the expansion or relocation of a landfill, and a more interconnected community.