| imageWorms on the Menu? |
| --- |
|  |
| **Article**  Lexile 850  AP Photo/Don Ryan  *Restaurant owner Dave Krick makes nutrient-rich dirt by feeding kitchen waste to worms.*  **BOISE, Idaho** (Achieve3000, June 24, 2010). At Dave Krick's restaurant in Boise, Idaho, humans are not the only ones enjoying the food. Krick's eatery also serves another species of diners, namely worms. The worms work around the clock to turn kitchen waste into compost. The effort is part of the restaurant owner's plan to reduce garbage.  For over a year, Krick has been feeding some 100 pounds of food waste a day to 200,000 Vermont red wiggler worms. The worms live in a metal bin in the basement of his restaurant. The large 14-by-4-foot bin contains a metal screen. The worms nestle on the screen in a dirt mixture. The dirt mixture contains everything from leftovers to kitchen scraps. The worms eat the food. Their solid waste—called "castings"—then mixes in with the dirt. This creates a compost soil that is high in nutrients. Krick uses the soil. He uses it to grow plants in his restaurant's outdoor planters. He also uses it in the garden at his home. This worm composting is known as*vermiculture*. The effort reduces waste from the restaurant.  Before Krick decided to take up vermiculture, he examined his restaurant's garbage. He wanted to determine where waste could be reduced. He considered the mass amount of food scraps that are thrown away. Krick decided to use worms to create compost. This practice is called *vermicomposting*. Krick then set up a vermicomposting bin in his restaurant's basement.  "We wanted to do onsite composting because it takes very little energy," Krick explained.  Only one other U.S. restaurant has taken up vermicomposting. It's located in Hawaii. Most restaurants don't have the space to do it. There's also the possible "Ewww!" problem. Customers might be disgusted by the thought of thousands of squirming eaters nearby.  "I [expected] that," said Tracy Solomon. Solomon is a manager at the restaurant in Hawaii that practices vermicomposting. "Sometimes when I go feed the worms I get a lot of people staring at me. [They wonder] what I'm dumping in the bins," she said.  Still, Solomon keeps her worm bins in an outdoor seating area. The area is right next to dining tables. Solomon has found that the wriggling composters are not as unappealing to customers as she had feared.  "People just think it sounds like an interesting step to take," Solomon said.  In Idaho, Krick's vermicomposting project has worked well. In fact, Krick plans to purchase another bin. He plans to double the number of worms he feeds. Krick hopes to someday sell the compost at a nearby nursery.  But Krick isn't expecting to become rich from the effort. The bin he uses cost about $12,000. According to Krick, selling the compost will cover only part of the startup costs.  "For us, we know that we're not ever going to [cover the startup costs]," Krick said. But reducing garbage is important, he said.  As his worm herd increases, Krick also hopes to sell starter buckets for home vermicomposting. Krick imagines customers taking home doggie bags from his restaurant. He hopes the leftovers will be fed to worms that came from his basement. If Solomon's experience in Hawaii is any sign, Krick's plan could go over very well with customers.  "Kids love it," said Solomon. "I do presentations for kids at schools. [We] give starter bins of worms and castings to the schools for their own gardening."  *The Associated Press contributed to this story.*    Dig Deeper  Decomposers and scavengers play an important role in food chains and food webs. When things die, they can't grow anymore. But the building block chemicals they contain, like carbon and nitrogen, need to be recycled into the soil. This allows them to be reused in food webs. That's where decomposers and scavengers come in.  Some animals, like turkey vultures, are scavengers. Scavengers eat dead animals by ripping them into smaller pieces. Then, decomposers such as worms, fungi, and bacteria go to work. They each break down material differently, but they all play an important role.  What if we didn't have decomposers and scavengers? Our world would be filled with dead material. In addition, plants wouldn't get the nutrients they need to grow.    **Dictionary**   |  | | --- | | **compost** *(noun)*    dead leaves, food, and other things that are added to soil to make it better | | **decomposer** *(noun)*    an organism that breaks down already dead organisms; it's last in a food chain | | **eliminate** *(verb)*    to get rid of | | **organic** *(adjective)*    produced by natural processes, without the use of chemicals or artificial substances | | **scavenger** *(noun)*    an organism that eats already dead organisms | | **sustainability** *(noun)*    the ability to preserve or maintain; the practice of trying to preserve natural resources for future generations | |