

Natural Upcycling - Recycling Food Waste and Converting it into Resources Such as Electricity or Natural Gas while Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Promoting Cleaner Air



Harry S. Cohen
CEO/FOUNDER

Natural Upcycling
www.naturalupcycling.com

Contact:
Harry S Cohen
585-584-3124
harry@naturalupcycling.com

Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Mr. Cohen, what is Natural Upcycling?

Mr. Cohen: Natural Upcycling is a food waste recycling business serving the mid-Atlantic and northeast regions.

CEOCFO: Would you explain food recycling?

Mr. Cohen: Both in the U.S. and globally, a significant portion of food is wasted. This waste accounts for 30-35% of everything we discard. Traditionally, food waste is sent to landfills, where it generates methane gas—a greenhouse gas that's highly harmful to the environment. By keeping food waste out of landfills, we not only address environmental issues but also contribute to the fight against food insecurity.

Our process involves collecting organic materials from sources like grocery stores and food manufacturers. We then process this waste through anaerobic digestion or composting. Anaerobic digestion, a method widely used in Europe, has gained popularity in the U.S. It allows us to harness bacteria to break down methane, converting it into resources such as electricity or natural gas. Composting is also highly sustainable, allowing food waste to decompose naturally and return nutrients to the soil, which is beneficial for landscaping, gardens, and agriculture.



CEO CFO: What is the interest today from businesses and potential clients?

Mr. Cohen: Many organizations are increasingly focused on social and environmental responsibility. There's a strong demand for zero-landfill initiatives and sustainable practices. Not only does this align with corporate social responsibility, but it can also be economically advantageous in the right market. The greatest impact is in the food waste sector, where we can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote cleaner air.

CEO CFO: What challenges are there in the process?

Mr. Cohen: Food waste collection is unlike traditional waste management. Though food recycling has become more mainstream in recent years, it still presents unique challenges. For example, food waste can produce strong odors and attract pests, so we've invested in specialized, waterproof trucks with built-in cleaning systems to maintain high standards.

Another challenge is contamination—when non-organic materials end up in the waste stream. While this was initially a major issue, we've since invested in technology that effectively separates inorganic matter, allowing us to capture more organic waste without requiring extensive pre-sorting on the customer's end.

CEO CFO: How do you separate recyclable from non-recyclable waste?

Mr. Cohen: Food waste can come in various packaging forms, including plastic containers, cans, and bottles. We typically provide customers with designated receptacles for food waste, separate from other recycling streams like cardboard or mixed paper.

"We pride ourselves on being a customer-centric organization. Our goal is to provide reliable, timely solutions to our clients' unique challenges." Harry S. Cohen

Our team educates clients extensively on the process. While this requires more time during implementation, it's essential for success. We also continue to engage and motivate our customers to keep contamination low, ensuring the quality of the materials we process.

CEO CFO: Natural Upcycling was named as a top company in Rochester. What is your growth strategy now?

Mr. Cohen: Word-of-mouth has been a tremendous asset for us, especially through our partnerships with major grocery retailers. We've seen growth by expanding our services to include private-label suppliers and other behind-the-scenes partners of these grocery chains. Additionally, we are leveraging social media to build brand awareness.

Our success also relies heavily on a dedicated team—clean trucks, efficient service, and committed employees who take pride in their work. Happy clients and a positive reputation fuel our growth.

CEO CFO: Are you facing challenges finding workers, as many companies are?

Mr. Cohen: Human resources are always a focus for us. We've committed to paying well and creating a balanced work environment that values both productivity and quality of life. This has contributed to our low turnover rate, which we're very proud of.

As we expand, our biggest challenge will be maintaining our strong culture. Growth means integrating new people who align with our values, and that's where we're focusing our HR efforts.

CEO CFO: What is your geographic range today, and do you see that expanding?

Mr. Cohen: We're based in Rochester, New York, but we currently service the northeast and mid-Atlantic states. Our next target is the southeastern U.S., where population growth supports an expansion in waste recycling services. Long-term, we see potential to operate on both coasts, given the more progressive recycling policies in these regions.