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Business: Ag: Treleven's values fit in with job

She does PR for organic fertilizer firm

By **ROBERT WALCH**
For *The Salinas Californian*

GONZALES - An avid home gardener and composter, Maury Treleven has been a longtime devotee of both the organic and recycling movements.

Because of this, her return to the workplace about two years ago was an easy transition.

When the stay-at-home mom agreed to step in to handle the outreach and public relations chores for what was then United Organic Products of Gonzales, Treleven said she had no problem embracing the firm's product line because it fit nicely with her "green" philosophy.

"Not many people have a chance to work at a job that, on a day-to-day basis, allows them to put their values into practice," she said. "I saw the opportunity to do that in this job."

United Organic, which was purchased in February by Converted Organics, recycles feedstock from a number of sources into organic liquid fertilizer for the agricultural marketplace. Where once their clients were drawn primarily from the organic sector, the company's products are now used by a much broader spectrum of growers, Treleven said.

When United Organic general manager Walter Lorente, a family friend, told Treleven the company was looking for someone to handle public relations, she agreed to visit the plant site.

"When I saw what they were doing, I was excited about both the process and the product," she said. "I decided it was time to return to work and was delighted to sign on to help with the marketing and PR for a new retail line that was being developed."

Food waste transformed

Licensed by the state Department of Health as a compost facility that can handle about 150 tons a day of source-separated food waste, Converted Organics receives this material from institutions, resorts, hospitals and large food-service operations and converts it into liquid, organic fertilizer.

The company has just finished upgrading its production facility and adding new grinding equipment, Treleven said, so it's now able to handle the maximum amount of food waste allowed by the company's state permit.

Treleven's present assignment is to make potential suppliers aware that Converted Organics can recycle separated food waste, thus putting this material to good use and preserving space in public landfills.

"It's literally a choice between making a right turn into the Johnson Canyon Landfill or a right turn into our facility," she said.

The Gonzales resident also conducts training workshops at the sites where waste food is collected, explaining how to separate the waste properly and why it is important to do so.

"We need a high quality feedstock, and it is important that the waste food is collected and separated in a certain way," she said.

Converted Organics uses an in-vessel composting process that breaks the feed stock down into a liquid in about two weeks. Other than air, nothing is added to the process. Once in liquid form, the product is filtered so it can be applied using drip irrigation or other field delivery systems.

Treleven said the firm's feedstock comes from a number of sources, including by-products from food processors plus some limited waste material from the seafood industry. Another important aspect of her job is handling the regulatory compliance and certification paperwork because the firm produces nothing but certified organic products.

'Self-sufficient facility'

Commenting on the heightened awareness of the benefits of organic fertilizers, Treleven said, "What's exciting is that more conventional growers are turning to this product. With the increase in the cost of oil, we are definitely competitive in price, and our fertilizer has many other benefits as well."

Emphasizing her belief in the value of recycling and a green workplace, Treleven explained that Converted Organics is not connected to any sewer line.

"We recover every bit of water and reuse it," she said. "Also, we don't generate any waste that has to be sent across the road to the landfill. This is a sustainable and self-sufficient facility."
