

Courtesy of Full Circle Mushroom Compost

# A Compost Convo: Q&A with Lisa Van Houten, Full Circle Mushroom Compost

**A**MI member Full Circle Mushroom Compost is on the front lines of mushroom compost innovation and education. The Rising Sun, MD-based company not only provides the industry with quality compost, but also offers a host of resources to help educate regulators, consumers, and others on the benefits of mushroom compost and its various uses. Recently, AMI sat down with Lisa Van Houten of Full Circle (FC) Mushroom Compost to learn more about the company.

**Mushroom News (MN): How long have you been in this business and what do you love about it?**

**Lisa Van Houten (LVH):** Back in 2009, a division of Hy-Tech Mushroom Compost was established to market Mushroom Compost using Fastrak Express as their logistic provider. In 2017, Fastrak Express decided to market Mushroom Compost under a different name and the name was changed to Full Circle Mushroom Compost, LLC. As the Marketing Strategist, I was tasked with all marketing aspects of the company including database development to track customers, quotes, inquiries, orders, advertising, tradeshow presence, marketing material, website and state registration requirements, to name a few. With my background in chemistry and sales, I get pleasure educating people on the types of compost and uses.

**MN: How did the pandemic impact FC's mushroom compost business? How did it impact your customers' use of your MC?**

**LVH:** The pandemic had a horrible effect on the ability for people to socialize, especially going out to eat. Since the restaurant industry essentially shut down, customers and the public started to grow their own food. Knowing the restaurant industry is a major purchaser of mushrooms and having to shut down, the mushroom industry curtailed its production, which in turn reduced the need for compost to grow the mushrooms. Yet the public wanted mushroom compost in their newly created gardens, so sales exploded. When these customers could not get their compost for three months, we were obligated to send them a notification

explaining this scenario and encourage them to "EAT MORE MUSHROOMS—THEY ARE GOOD FOR YOU!" We also gave them the link to AMI Mushroom Nutrition facts.

**MN: What are the most effective pieces of information to share about mushroom compost when marketing it to farmers, consumers or other customers?**

**LVH:** It depends on the use. Established farmers "get it" and just order. New farmers and consumers need to be educated. My conversations generally focus on a few questions: Have you done a soil analysis, and did it include an organic matter determination? What are you trying to grow: food, grass, flowers, etc.? How much do you need?

**MN: Your website is a treasure trove of important information for customers of all sorts—how long have you been developing the site and what are some of the exciting analytics of usage you have for it?**

**LVH:** The website Library page ([www.fullcirclemushroom-compost.com/information-center/library/](http://www.fullcirclemushroom-compost.com/information-center/library/)) has been developed from day one, simply because I don't want to remember it. In general, the chemical analysis and pasteurization process are the two most downloaded articles. I tell people if you don't know the chemistry of the compost you are going to use, you don't know what you are putting on the ground or the results you may get.

**MN: What's the most harmful misconception about mushroom compost out there? How do you address it?**

**LVH:** Odor. I explain to people that the odor is an indication that the compost is not fully composted, has the highest micro-nutrient capacity and lowest carbon to nitrogen ratio. The odor will dissipate in a few days or when incorporated into the soil.

**MN: If you could wave a magic wand and change anything about your business world, what would it be?**

**LVH:** Finding truck drivers, so we can expand our market place and make daily logistics easier to handle.