Measure for Measure

W. Edwards Deming is heralded as the godfather of quality management. He was a statistician who was invited to Japan by the Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers (JUSE). Their invitation occurred after General MacArthur's staff identified that quality problems prevalent in their country were based on outmoded management practices. Deming invented a systematic approach to management that was built on the concept of a four part cyclical series:

- Plan (a change)
- Do (as in try it out)
- Check (or study the results)
- Act (to adopt the change, reject it, or redesign and repeat to continually improve)

Within the systems approach Deming realized the importance of measurement to demonstrate change but he did not advocate measurement as a number crunching exercise to keep bean counters happy. Deming advocated a system of measurement, founded on collecting meaningful data, using it to identify the root cause of problems, which was intended to help people develop appropriate solutions, plan to use them and then make the changes necessary to incorporate them to improve the system, NOT specific performance targets. Among a myriad of reasons why a systems approach including a system of measurement is so appropriate is that Deming realized that many numbers needed are not quantifiable. Even the renowned economist John Maynard Keynes noted: "There is a relation between the evidence and the event considered, but it is not necessarily measurable."

Where does this discussion lead us in the midst of articles about Statistics?

All the data and statistics that www.glassworks.org could develop, research or share with its readers are without value unless we come back to the original purpose of Statistics, a measurement of the state, and use them to change behaviour.

Our confidence in measurement fails, and we reject it, when we disengage statistics from the system (state) that we operate it. Without taking individual action to change our wasteful behaviours, we will collectively fail to meet the objective of waste diversion, which is better use of natural resources including land. It is the system that must be built supported by all the stakeholders in the supply chain for all materials, not just some of the materials for recycling and some organics.

Let's make sure 50% is not a measure of our ignorance, but the start of our success.