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Rickreall Dairy's cows set to become energy source

Staff

Project would convert manure
into gas used to fire generators

Other cow-power projects

Cal-Gon Farms, a **dairy** on Wallace Road NW near West Salem, has operated a small methane digester for four years as a demonstration project for Portland General Electric. It produces enough electricity for 40 to 45 homes.

Jer-Osa Organic **Dairy**, near Gervais, also plans to build a methane digester by next year. Costing about \$600,000 to \$800,000 to develop, it will be similar in size to the one at Cal-Gon Farms.

Craven Farms **dairy** in Tillamook County had a digester installed in 1997 that was designed to handle waste from as many as 1,000 cows. The **dairy** ceased operation in 1999 because of financial problems unrelated to the digester.

BY MICHAEL ROSE

Statesman Journal

The cows at **Rickreall Dairy** soon might provide the raw materials for the largest manure-to-energy project in Oregon.

If the project succeeds, waste from 1,700 mature cows and 1,400 young stock at the Polk County **dairy** will be converted to methane gas and used to fire electric power generators. Processing the methane with a "scrubber" and selling it to a natural-gas utility also has been discussed. A by-product of the methane digester would be a peat-moss-like fiber that could be used for compost or bedding for cows.

"Everything that is brought on the property will be hauled off and sold, either in milk, fiber, electricity, gas or fertilizer," said Louie Kazemier, a co-owner of **Rickreall Dairy**.

RealEnergy, a Yountville, Calif., company better known for developing on-site power systems for commercial buildings, is the **dairy's** partner in the project. RealEnergy would receive the bulk of income from the electricity and other products.

"I'm not going to get rich off of this," Kazemier said.

What it would do, he said, is save the **dairy** money and give it options to expand its herd.

Waste-management issues limit how many cows the **dairy** can keep. The digester also would control odor problems.

Drivers along Highway 22 would see a collection of tanks next to the dairy, where the waste would be heated to about 102 degrees and processed into methane. Three full-time workers would staff the digester.

Most of the \$6 million project's financing would come from government loans and energy-tax credits, all of which still needs to be finalized before construction begins.

"I think we're over the hurdles," said Charlie Smither of RealEnergy's acquisitions and development department.

Oregon Department of Energy officials said that the Rickereall project could generate about 6 million kilowatt hours of electricity per year. Pacific Power would purchase the electricity, which would be enough to keep the lights on at 500 homes for a year.

The energy department is considering providing about \$3 million from the State Energy Loan Program to help finance the **Rickereall** project, state officials said. The loan application will be reviewed by a state advisory board in August.

RealEnergy's Smither said that construction of the energy project - the company's first methane digester - could start by September.

A facility operated by the Port of Tillamook Bay now is the largest methane digester in Oregon. It produces only one-fifth as much electricity as the one planned for **Rickereall**.

The Tillamook project - named the Hooley Digester in honor U.S. Rep. Darlene Hooley, who helped secure \$1.7 million in federal funds for the \$3 million project - processes manure from Tillamook-area **dairies**.

Port officials acknowledge that the digester has had design problems and equipment defects. After three years of tweaking the digester's operations, it's on the verge of becoming profitable, they say.

"It's been a real challenge," port manager Jack Crider said.

The high cost of trucking waste from farms to the facility has cut into the Tillamook digester's potential profits. The self-contained **Rickereall** project wouldn't have those trucking costs and could benefit from newer technologies, which would give it definite advantages, Crider said.

Rickereall Dairy's Kazemier spent several years attempting to find the right business partners interested in developing a digester on his farm before making an agreement with RealEnergy.

Organix Inc., a Walla Walla, Wash., company, would market the fiber leftovers from the plant.

Kazemier has considered adding a phase that would remove nutrients, such as nitrogen and calcium, from the remaining liquid waste and selling the resulting product as an organic fertilizer.

The farm's holding pond, along Highway 22, would become "more or less a fresh-water holding area," he said.

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