

Project renews focus on methane digester adoption

Research to help meet targets for emissions reduction

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An agreement between the dairy industry and Idaho's Center for Advanced Energy Studies to bring renewable-energy technology to dairies has won praise from Idaho Dairymen's Association.

The objective is to identify opportunities for dairy farms to increase renewable-energy production through anaerobic digesters, gasification and composting.

"It demonstrates, not only for Idaho dairymen but the national industry, how proactive (dairymen) are in looking at the environmental problems they make and how to resolve them," said Bob Naerebout, executive director Idaho Dairymen's Association.

The partnership between the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, the Dairy Research Institute and CAES was announced last week in Boise.

The initiative is a step in the U.S. dairy industry's agreement with USDA to reduce greenhouse gases 25 percent by the year 2020, Naerebout said.

When USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack announced in December 2009 an agreement to reduce greenhouse gases, dairymen raised concerns because digesters are too costly for most producers and the technology is still unreliable.

This initiative is to address those hurdles and will focus on how to successfully bring digesters to dairies of all sizes, Naerebout said.

"The Innovation Center's goal is to have 1,300 digesters operating in the U.S. dairy industry by the year 2020," he said.

On research topic is the feasibility of manure from multiple dairies going to a shared digester, he said.

The partnership will identify best management practices for farm-based renewable energy, analyze utility grid infrastructure and incentives and identify opportunities to increase funding of related national research.

The partnership could benefit dairy farms across the country, said Mike Roth, president of the Idaho Dairymen's Association and board member of the Dairy Research Institute.

"As one of the largest dairy-producing states in the country, we're happy to see a national relationship like this develop in our own backyard," he said.

The research might have led to a better outcome at one Idaho dairy. Intrepid Technology had installed a digester on Tony VanderHulst's Wendell dairy a few years ago, but it didn't work out and isn't currently operating.

The digester never created enough gas to capture. Some digesters seem to be working, but the trouble is the technology is still new, VanderHulst said.

He still supports using manure to create renewable energy.

"It'll help the environment and get rid of some of our waste and transfer it into energy," he said.