



Ohio, Pennsylvania big recipients of USDA biodigester funds



COLUMBUS — The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced millions of dollars in grants and loans that will help fund anaerobic digester projects in seven states to encourage renewable energy production and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and farm-based pollution.

Ohio is receiving funding for at least five — the most of any state — while Pennsylvania will receive funding for three.

Funding for the biodigesters is provided through the USDA Rural Energy for America Program.

“These projects allow Ohio’s agricultural producers to tap into the growing clean energy economy — improving conservation practices and creating jobs throughout our state,” said U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio.

Many projects

Brown also fought for funding of a different biodigester project to address algal blooms in Grand Lake St. Marys. In August, the USDA awarded \$1 million to Quasar Energy to bring the technology to the region.

Quasar Energy will assist with all but one of the Ohio projects. Locations range from a waste water treatment plant in Wooster, to a livestock farm in Cardington.

“It definitely illustrates the U.S Department of Agriculture’s dedication to bringing renewable energy to rural areas and for Quasar,” said Caroline Henry, vice president of marketing for Quasar Energy Group. “We’re proud to be part of it.”

Quasar produces electricity and compressed natural gas from its digesters. It currently offers its own QNG — Quasar Natural Gas — from the firm’s Columbus location.

The biodigester to be built at the waste water treatment plant in Wooster, Ohio, is expected to produce 2 million kilowatt hours of renewable energy each year, and is funded in part with a \$500,000 grant and \$750,000 loan combination. It will produce enough electric to power more than 200 homes a year.

Big accomplishment

“This round of REAP funding places Ohio in the forefront of the anaerobic digester industry nationwide,” said Ohio Rural Development State Director Tony Logan, in a statement. “These advanced biodigesters not only create jobs for Ohioans, they turn our existing waste streams — municipal waste, foods, oils and grease and livestock manure — into valuable biomass inputs. They are solid investments for our economy and our environment.”

Big picture

The energy announcement is in concert with an agreement signed by Vilsack in December, 2009. During climate change talks in Copenhagen, Denmark, the secretary signed a historic agreement to help U.S. dairy producers cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The agreement between USDA and the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy calls for the parties to work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from dairy farms by 25 percent by 2020.

Vilsack said the agency is on track to fund an average of one biodigester a week for the coming year.

In Fiscal Year 2011, USDA, through the REAP program, provided over \$20 million in assistance for biodigesters, and leveraged \$110 million in other funds. Through its Value-Added Producer Grant program, USDA provides planning grants of up to \$100,000 and working capital grants of up to \$300,000 to be used for establishment of a biodigester.

Additionally, the Natural Resources Conservation Service offers financial and technical assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives program.