

USA: Dairy industry sets goal to launch 1,300 anaerobic digesters

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On Wednesday, The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, the Dairy Research Institute and Idaho's Center for Advanced Energy Studies (CAES) announced plans to have 1,300 anaerobic digesters operating across the country by 2020.

The Center for Advanced Energy Studies, based in Idaho Falls, includes the U.S. Department of Energy, Idaho National Laboratory and Idaho's research universities.

The focus is on increasing the economic viability of dairy farms and rural communities country wide.

"This is really good news, not only for the dairy industry but for the citizens of Idaho as well," said Bob Naerebout, Idaho Dairymen's Association executive director. "Seeing this initiative through will substantially reduce our industry's carbon footprint."

INL Director of Education Programs Melinda Hamilton, also the Bioenergy Initiative Lead Center for Advanced Energy Studies, said bringing together many stakeholders will help address how to convert animal and farm waste into biofuels in a cost effective and efficient manner.

"Bringing more entities together means we'll be able to identify more solutions," Hamilton told the Times-News during a phone interview, adding that more partners and more solutions increases opportunities for funding- both private and public.

"Research has to be done to find viable options," she said.

Idaho currently has several anaerobic digesters at dairies producing electricity for the power grid.

Digesters hold environmental and economic potential but their adoption in the U.S. is challenged by technology application, high-capital outlays, regulatory barriers and limited financing programs.

Many dairymen, especially small producers can't afford the \$1 million (minimum) up-front investment, Hamilton said.

We have to identify opportunities for dairy farms of all sizes and research best management practices," Hamilton said.

In a prepared statement, Jerome dairyman and Idaho Dairymen's Association President Mike Roth said the partnership could greatly benefit dairy farms across the country.

“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,” said Roth. “Making the most efficient use of natural resources, such as energy, water and waste by products, not only contributes to profitability, it also lessens environmental impact.”

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