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Digester technology highlights 'Got Manure?' conference

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A national conference on managing dairy manure – with a strong focus on anaerobic digestion – attracted 300 technical and engineering professionals and some large-herd dairy producers, Mar. 27-29, in Syracuse, N.Y.

Titled “Got Manure? Enhancing Environmental and Economic Sustainability,” the conference was hosted by USDA’s AgSTAR and Natural Resource Conservation Service, Cornell’s PRO-DAIRY and the New York State Energy Research and Development Agency (NYSERDA).

Tours of three digester sites in Central New York, along with panel discussions, technical presentations and networking, were designed to find new solutions for dairy nutrient management. There are 186 digesters currently operating on U.S. dairy farms, but many more producers would benefit from this technology, speakers said.

Dairy producer and co-op leader Mike McCloskey reported on his work as chair of the sustainability committee of the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy. He said a recent meeting at the White House was part of an effort to convince the Obama Administration that properly treated livestock manure offers more advantages than wind power or solar in the production of “green” energy and reducing greenhouse gases.

He described his own experience at the 30,000-cow Fair Oaks Farm in northern Indiana, where seven digesters make the operation self sufficient with electricity. He said the next step is using the farm’s bio-gas to power the fleet of 42 18-wheelers that haul milk from the farm to processors in three states.

For more on the conference, visit www.epa.gov/agstar/