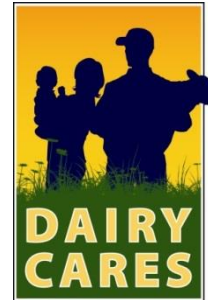


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## Dairy Cares Newsletter

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[DairyCares.com](http://DairyCares.com)

### 2014: A year for dairy biogas digesters?

For most of the past two decades, there has been a robust public discussion and organized effort toward realizing the vision of building biogas digesters on California dairies. And with good reason: This technology promises the potential to create renewable energy and reduce environmental impacts while creating a new source of sustainable revenue for family farmers.

Despite this exciting potential, today, there are a little over a dozen biogas digester projects on dairies throughout California – about 1 percent of the state’s total dairies.

How can we tap this potential for dairies to be part of a green energy future for California? Offering the dual benefit of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating renewable energy, dairy digesters capture biogas from enclosed dairy manure containment ponds or tanks. Like natural gas, manure biogas can be combusted in engines to generate electricity, or in furnaces, stoves and boilers to create heat. And as the natural gas economy in the U.S. continues to develop, the opportunity to use renewable natural gas from dairies only improves.

The key is achieving economic viability so the idea can be adopted more widely. Biogas digesters remain a capital-intensive technology, out of reach to most dairy farmers. The good news is that after years of collaborative effort with government agency partners, the energy industry and entrepreneurs, California may be better positioned than ever for growth in new dairy digester construction.

The close of last year saw a handful of new dairy digester projects come online in California counties, such as in [Sacramento](#) and [Merced](#). These dairies are now producing a flexible and renewable source of clean, green energy absent the use of fossil fuels.

Looking ahead, a recently completed [USDA study](#) may offer a successful blueprint for constructing additional dairy digesters in California. The study analyzed the economic viability of digester projects through linking dairies together in a “hub-and-spoke” model to collect biogas at a centralized processing facility.

Regardless of the model, any and all new digester projects in California benefit the environment, further improving dairy farmers’ already stunning progress to reduce their “carbon footprint” (the amount of greenhouse gases created in producing milk). Today, the U.S. has about 16.3 million *fewer* dairy cows than in

1944, yet these cows produce 59 percent more milk. These increases in efficiency, won through hard work and research to promote better animal health and nutrition, have resulted in a **65 percent reduction in the carbon footprint of a gallon of milk**. Few other sectors of the economy can tell such a positive story of increased productivity coupled with lower emissions.

As 2014 unfolds, the California dairy community will continue its decades-long work to bring more cost-effective, environmentally friendly dairy digesters to our state. With continued effort and progress, more California dairy families will be adding clean, green, renewable energy to the list of nutritious dairy products they already produce for our state, nation and world.

*Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability and responsible animal care. Our members include Bar 20 Dairy Farms, California Cattlemen's Association, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Dairy Research Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America-Western Area Council, Dairy Institute of California, GHD, Inc., Hilmar Cheese Co., Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O'Lakes, Merck Animal Health, Milk Producers Council, Ruan Transport Corp., Western United Dairywomen, Yosemite Farm Credit and others. For information, visit [DairyCares.com](http://DairyCares.com) or call 916-441-3318.*