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Cow power takes to the highways

LINDSAY
February 12, 2009 12:04am

- **UPDATED at 11:41 a.m. with audio**
- **Nation's first manure-power trucks unveiled**
- **'In California, the manure is plentiful'**

If the air horn on that bright red Hilarides Dairy tractor-trailer rig sounds a bit like a bleating cow, there may be more than your imagination at work.

Lindsay dairy farmer Rob Hilarides has completed a manure-to-gas project that lets him run two trucks on clean-burning bio-methane.

A \$600,000 grant from the California Air Resources Board's Alternative Fuel Incentive Program helped the Central Valley dairy farmer pay for the project that takes manure from his 10,000 cows, flushes it into huge, covered, lagoon for an anaerobic digestion process and then taps the methane given off by the decomposition process.

"It's energy projects like this that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and get us off our dependency of foreign oil," says Air Resources Board Chairman Mary Nichols. "It also addresses sources of long term air and water pollution problems."

Mr. Hilarides converted two heavy-duty diesel trucks to run on the bio-methane product. The project generates 226,000 cubic feet of bio-gas per day and enough fuel to run two heavy duty trucks that make daily runs. This has reduced the dairy's diesel consumption by 650 gallons a day.

The Central Valley businessman says he intends to convert five pick-up trucks to use the same fuel.

"In California, the manure is plentiful, the technology is here and public-private partnerships can make this work," says Allen Dusault, Sustainable Conservation's director of sustainable agriculture.

"Biomethane is the only vehicle fuel that is carbon negative. The production process prevents greenhouse gases from reaching the atmosphere, and the resulting fuel is clean burning. Across the nation, the benefit to the climate could be as great as taking 16 million cars off the road."

(Mr. Dusault talks about the Hilarides project and the impact regional air regulators are having on this and similar projects in a CVBT Audio Interview. Please left-click on the link below to listen now or right-click to download the MP3 audio file to your computer or mobile media device.)

Mr. Hilarides says it just made sense to invest in the technology.

"Now we can utilize the dairy's potential to power our trucks, in addition to generating electricity for our operations. This will significantly reduce our energy costs and give us some protection from volatile energy prices," he says.

The Air Resources Board says the Hilarides Dairy project was supported by state officials because the process reduces volatile organic compounds and greenhouse gasses, generates compressed natural gas, an alternative to diesel, and minimizes two sources of the Central Valley's air pollution problem. Redirecting the cow waste to produce natural gas and rededicating diesel engines to run on the alternative fuel is a replicable process and its hope many farms throughout the state will embrace the option.

In addition to Hilarides Dairy and CARB, taking part in the project were: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Western United Resource Development, Inc.; Western United Dairymen; Sustainable Conservation; CalStart; California Department of Food and Agriculture; Hilmar Cheese Company; Kustom Products; Phase 3 Renewables; and University of California, Davis.

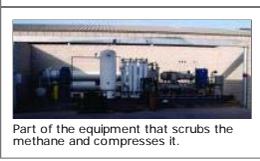
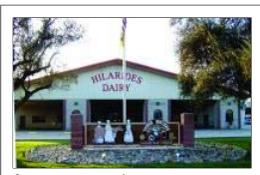
(Photos courtesy Western United Dairymen)

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