

BUSINESS

Dairy manure to be tapped for natural gas

PUC backs Fresno County operation that will also cut methane emissions.

By Dennis Pollock - Fresno Bee

June 15, 2007

BUSINESS section, Page D4

A Fresno County dairy is the first to be approved by the California Public Utilities Commission to produce natural gas from animal waste.

Methane from the dairy -- up to 3 billion cubic feet per year -- will be used to deliver renewable electricity to homes in Central and Northern California.

Bakersfield-based BioEnergy Solutions was granted approval for the project late last month at its Vintage Dairy near Riverdale.

Manure from the farm's dairy cows will be flushed into covered lagoons that trap the methane produced as the manure decomposes. The methane will be upgraded to remove carbon dioxide and corrosive materials to meet Pacific Gas and Electric standards for power plants. It will then be delivered through the utility's pipeline.

David Albers, president of BioEnergy, also owns the Fresno County dairy.

Albers said he has been talking with other dairy operators and expects to have similar projects at up to 50 farms in Fresno, Kern, Tulare and Kings counties within two years.

Susan Carothers, a PUC spokeswoman, said she also expects more companies will follow with projects like the BioEnergy effort in the San Joaquin Valley "because of all the dairies." California is home to about 2,000 dairy farms with more than 2 million cows.

"It will help clean up the air as the population grows," she said.

BioEnergy officials believe its system can cut methane emissions from a dairy by as much as 70 percent.

The agreement will also help PG&E meet a state requirement to have 20 percent of its power under contract from renewable sources by 2010.

Other projects in the works include one by Central California Power to build a 217-megawatt power plant somewhere in Tulare County. Joe Langenberg, sole proprietor of the business, said it will be a hybrid, using roughly half natural gas and half renewable fuel or "biogas."

In November, New Hampshire-based Environmental Power Corp. announced a deal to build methane digesters at six large central San Joaquin Valley dairies and supply natural gas they generate to PG&E.

Ground will be broken for the project in the next few weeks at the Vintage Dairy.

