Factory Farm Biogas
Is a False Solution to Climate Change
By Food and Water Watch

Fossil fuel and agribusiness are joining forces to promote a greenwashed nightmare, manure as ‘renewable’ energy. Manure digesters capture methane from decomposing manure to create ‘Biogas’ which can be used to create electricity or converted into natural gas and moved through pipelines. But Biogas is a false solution, and it won’t address our climate change crisis, our rampant water pollution, or our factory farm problem.

Biogas technology is being promoted as ‘renewable’ energy and a water pollution solution across the United States and Europe. The increase in Biogas production can be attributed to renewable energy policies backed by the European Union, which promotes Biogas as economically and environmentally beneficial, and in the U.S. where agribusiness interests like Smithfield Foods have lobbied for subsidies from several levels of government.

In reality, this worldwide promotion of Biogas as ‘Renewable’ by agribusinesses and fracking and natural gas industries is misleading and harmful. Burning dirty Biogas releases carbon dioxide and other pollutants including smog-forming nitrogen oxides, ammonia and hydrogen sulfide, potentially offsetting other greenhouse gas reductions. Additionally, Biogas is comprised of roughly 50 to 70 percent methane, a potent greenhouse gas, nearly 90 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.

The focus on the supposedly ‘Renewable’ nature of Biogas ignores the many environmental and health threats posed by a major source of this gas - manure from factory farms. Factory farms place our public health and food supply at risk, pollute the environment and our drinking water, and wreck rural communities - while increasing corporate control over our food. Manure digesters will not address any of these issues, and in fact will only further entrench the factory farm model by creating a new market for the enormous amount of waste they produce.

Factories in the U.S. are also predominately located in low-income communities and communities of color. The placement of digesters in these communities will only exacerbate the existing environmental degradation through the increased presence of factory farms to facilitate biogas production, the use of diesel trucks to cart manure to and from digesters, and the invasive construction of pipelines to move biogas.

As the threats of global climate change and fossil fuel dependence are increasingly being felt worldwide, we do not have time to entertain false solutions like Biogas. Investing in natural gas infrastructure and factory farm-linked Biogas shifts critical resources away from efforts to reduce emissions and to develop truly renewable energy. It is time to invest in a just transition to a 100 percent, zero emission, clean energy future, not a factory farm Biogas.

We need to work together at the state and federal levels to oppose the buildup of biogas infrastructure including tax incentives or other forms of public support for the expansion of biogas, the inclusion of animal manure-based power in the definition of renewable energy and in renewable energy credit or incentive programs, the award of renewable energy grants or loans for the construction of anaerobic digesters on livestock operations, and new pipeline construction.

For more information and to get involved go to: www.foodandwaterwatch.org

Large Scale Methane Digester rely on manure from factory farms. It creates methane and other pollution. This one is like the ‘exploded’ near Waunakee leaking manure into Lake Mendota. Photo Source: Cap Times -Mike DeVries

Factory Farm Defenders
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