

## **FOTC Response to Ecology Reassurances Regarding Washington’s Carbon Offsets for Manure Methane**

**Ecology does not believe that the protocol incentivizes an increase in the number of cattle in at a facility or incentivizes digester facilities where green field manure management would be feasible.**

Response: This is incorrect.

- A case study in Kewaunee County Wisconsin, where five large CAFO dairies have built digesters, found that herd sizes increased by 5.2% per year after digesters were introduced.<sup>2</sup>
- A national study found, “Herd sizes at facilities with digesters grew 3.7% year-over-year, which is 24 times the growth rate for overall dairy herd sizes in the states covered by our data set.”<sup>3</sup>

**Ecology says: The adopted protocol may only be used in the context of specific types of operations where emissions from manure management are typically significant in common practice.**

What this means is that dairies that practice liquid manure management are eligible to participate in large scale anaerobic digester projects while others are not. Liquid manure management means flushing manure into anaerobic lagoons where methane is generated. Here is a picture that shows how manure is flushed from the barns where cows eat and sleep.



Waste from cows at Four J Farms is flushed into a machine that separates solid and liquid manure.

Source: Capital and Main. 2023. How a California Dairy Methane Project Threatens Residents’ Air and Water. <https://capitalandmain.com/how-a-california-dairy-methane-project-threatens-residents-air-and-water>

Consequently, only dairies with liquid manure management will reap the economic benefits from large scale anaerobic manure digesters. Benefits can be as high as \$1,800 per year per cow.<sup>4</sup> The extra water needed to flush manure is a concern in areas where drought is an issue.

**Ecology says: Livestock Project offset credits are only generated for emissions reductions that occurred beyond the established baseline emissions of the operation. For example, Section 3.1 of the adopted 2014 Livestock Projects protocol specifies that all offset projects listed under the protocol must “capture methane that would otherwise be emitted to the atmosphere.”**

What this means is that only methane from existing anaerobic manure lagoons counts in the protocol. How is this enforceable? We do not see any plan for characterizing manure management in Washington State. Ecology does not have the resources to survey all 265 Washington dairies and determine which dairies use anaerobic manure lagoons and which ones do not, which ones use manure solids separation and which ones do not, or how efficiently these practices are implemented on each facility. Since 2015 Ecology and the WA State Dept. of Agriculture have not even been able to inspect all WA dairy manure lagoons.<sup>5</sup>

**In addition, Ecology requires that all offset projects demonstrate to Ecology that they will incur no significant environmental impacts after mitigation (WAC 173-446-500(1)(f)). A SEPA analysis will typically be required for the installation of an anaerobic digester. Through that SEPA analysis process applicants are required to evaluate and address any adverse impacts such as water quality impacts, air pollution impacts, and transportation impacts.**

This statement insults us. For the past year the Friends of Toppenish Creek have tried unsuccessfully to secure an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for an Anaerobic Manure Digester proposed for the Port of Sunnyside in the Yakima Valley. This would be one of the largest digesters in the nation and would produce 830,000 MMBtus per year of Renewable Natural Gas.

The City of Sunnyside has issued several iterations of a Mitigated Determination of Non-Significance (MDNS) which states there is no anticipated environmental impact and an EIS is not required. It is impossible to construct a facility of this size and not impact the environment. Yet officials stand by their determination and refuse to produce an EIS.

The SEPA review that led to the MDNS contained absolutely no analysis of impacts on air quality. The Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency simply stated in the last iterations that an air quality permit would be required – after the MDNS is already in place.

Anaerobic manure digesters do impact the air.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup> FOTC has shown that just transporting manure to the proposed digester and transporting digestate back to farms would require about 1,500 miles per day of heavy duty diesel truck traffic on Yakima county roads.<sup>9</sup>

- 1 Yakima Herald Republic. 2020. Composted cows a success story for some, a concern for others. [https://www.yakimaherald.com/news/local/composted-cows-a-success-story-for-some-a-concern-forothers/article\\_4a007eb6-3947-574d-9f9a-1a355620fa1b.html](https://www.yakimaherald.com/news/local/composted-cows-a-success-story-for-some-a-concern-forothers/article_4a007eb6-3947-574d-9f9a-1a355620fa1b.html)
- 2 Friends of the Earth, Socially Responsible Agriculture Project. 2024. Making a Bad Situation Worse: Manure Digesters at Mega Dairies in Wisconsin. [https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/WI-Case-Study\\_v2.pdf](https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/WI-Case-Study_v2.pdf)
- 3 Friends of the Earth. Socially Responsible Agriculture Project. 2024. Biogas or Bull\*\*\*\*\*? The Deceptive Promise of Manure Biogas as a Methane Solution. [https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Factory-Farm-GasBrief\\_final.pdf](https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Factory-Farm-GasBrief_final.pdf)
- 4 Dr. Aaron Smith at UC Davis. 2022. The Dairy Cow Manure Gold Rush. <https://asmith.ucdavis.edu/news/revisiting-value-dairy-cow-manure>
- 5 Friends of Toppenish Creek. 2023. Tech Note 23. <https://www.friendsoftoppenishcreek.org/issues/data.html>
- 6 Friends of the Earth. Socially Responsible Agriculture Project. 2024. Biogas or Bull\*\*\*\*\*? The Deceptive Promise of Manure Biogas as a Methane Solution. Table 1. Page 23/70. [https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/FactoryFarm-Gas-Brief\\_final.pdf](https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/FactoryFarm-Gas-Brief_final.pdf)
- 7 Inside Climate News. 2024. Biofuel Refineries are Releasing Toxic Air Pollutants in Farm Communities Across the US. [Biofuel Refineries Are Releasing Toxic Air Pollutants in Farm Communities Across the US - Inside Climate News](#)
- 8 Public Justice et al. 2021. Petition for Rulemaking to Exclude All Fuels Derived from Biomethane from Dairy and Swine Manure from the Low Carbon Fuel Standard Program. [2021.10.27 Petition for Rulemaking AIR et al. .pdf \(ca.gov\)](#)
- 9 FOTC. 2023. Comments regarding the Sunnyside RNG Traffic Impact Analysis August 28, 2023. [file:///C:/Users/Jean%20Mendoza/Downloads/CAFO%20GP%20New%20Combined%20Permit\\_2022%20\(21\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Jean%20Mendoza/Downloads/CAFO%20GP%20New%20Combined%20Permit_2022%20(21).pdf)