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Anaerobic Digester Funding Available For Feasibility Studies

by Jim Seiler

The benefits to dairy farms utilizing anaerobic digestion are many, including reduction of waste odors, production of manure solids for bedding, pathogen reduction, fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and production of biogas and electricity for farm use and sale on the power grid.

This year, NYSERDA petitioned the Public Service Commission to increase the maximum funding incentives from \$1 million to \$2 million for project construction. This will likely make digesters more financially feasible to construct on dairy farms.

Before delving into a digester project, farm management should complete an anaerobic digester feasibility study. This is an analysis and evaluation to determine if an anaerobic digester is technically possible, feasible within an estimated cost, and potentially profitable. Feasibility studies may include a farm energy audit. Patrick Ries of Asset Resource Management, LLC, reviewed a sample anaerobic digester feasibility study at the 2012 Got Manure Conference. His presentation can be found at www.ansci.cornell.edu/prodairy/gotmanure/proceedings.html.

As a component of the feasibility study, there are farm-specific questions that must be answered. Will the farm be in a position to sell power to the local grid? Is there potential to convert methane to fuel for fleet trucks or other farm equipment? Does the farm have the capital, employees, and time to devote to a digester project?

In addition to loans and grants for anaerobic digester construction, there are also opportunities to apply for funding to complete anaerobic digester feasibility studies through NYSERDA and USDA Rural Development REAP Program. These programs include:

- 1) USDA Rural Development REAP Program – Rural Energy For America Program Feasibility Study Grants. Grant requests may not exceed the lesser of 25% of eligible project costs or \$50,000.
- 2) NYSERDA–Technical Assistance Combined Heat & Power and Renewable Energy Program
- 3) NYSERDA- Flex Tech Program

Both NYSERDA programs, in their most recent solicitation, had a maximum of \$50,000 and required a minimum of 50% co-funding.

For more information on these programs, visit:

*USDA Rural Development – REAP Program www.rurdev.usda.gov_reap.html

*NYSERDA www.nyserda.ny.gov/Funding-Opportunities.aspx

CAFO Farms Should Be Aware Of Operation and Maintenance Requirements

By: Jim Booth, Certified planner

In less than a year, all farms with a CAFO permit should have all of the Best Management Practices (BMP's) identified in their Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) completed. Most Medium CAFOs, covered under the State's ECL Permit, were granted an extension until June 30, 2014 to fully implement their CNMP. Large CAFO's covered under the Clean Water Act Permit were required to be fully implemented by June 30, 2006. If you received an extension you should be working toward completing your remaining BMP's. Issuance of new versions of the ECL and Clean Water Act Permits are expected on or about June 30, 2014. Do not expect that any further extensions will be granted.

Now that all CAFO's are fully implemented, or will be by next year, you should be paying more attention to required operation and maintenance to keep your BMP's functioning as they were designed. During recent inspections by the DEC and Environmental Protection Agency, more emphasis has been placed on documenting that you are following your Operation and Maintenance (O and M) plans. If a BMP is not operating as it was designed, then you are in violation of your CAFO Permit and you may be required to have an engineer reevaluate the practice and follow their recommendations to correct any deficiencies. To avoid these situations, there are several things you should be

doing. First, review all engineering designs for your installed practices. Your engineer should have included specific operation and maintenance requirements for the practice that you are expected to carry out every year. Copies of these may also be found in the Operation and Maintenance section of the Farmstead Record Keeping Book that your CAFO Planner gives you each year. Also in this section of your Record Book is the Operation and Maintenance Schedule for your operation. You should carefully review and follow both the practice specific O and M prepared by your engineer and the O and M schedule and documentation required under your permit. For instance, record the dates that you mow your vegetated treatment area and when you inspect roof gutters or drip trenches. For your convenience, a calendar has been included in the O and M section of your Farmstead Record Book that can be used for this purpose. DEC inspectors have been asking to see some kind of documentation that you are actually performing required operation and maintenance. If you have any questions or need help setting up a system for properly documenting performance of required O and M, your CAFO Planner will be happy to assist you.

Avoid Fall Burn-Down Failure

This year, we saw an unprecedented number of re-sprays on fall-killed sods. Some fields even required two additional attempts this spring to finish last year's burn-down. The best way to avoid these repeated trips across the field is to properly time your burn-down this fall. More accurately, the re-growth prior to burn-down must be properly timed.

Last year, after early season struggles with frost damage and armyworm losses, growers attempted to harvest every possible inch of forage growth. This led to an additional cutting on grass and alfalfa fields late in the season. Without proper re-growth, the fall burn-downs were not effective. In order to avoid such issues this year, fourth cutting should be completed by early September, or fields planned for rotation should be limited to only three cuttings. Thankfully, most areas have reaped a better harvest this year and bunk inventory is not at the critical level of twelve months ago .

Is Our Seed Corn as Protected as We Think?

By: Chad Stoeckl

As we all start planning next year's crops before the current crop is harvested (or should we say the seed dealers start knocking on your door), some observations from the 2012 and 2013 growing seasons pertaining to crop protection warrant consideration.

The trend for most farms today is Triple Stacked or Quad Stacked trait packages and why not! When planting a high value crop and attempting to maximize yield potential, it is just common sense to add the highest protection package one can buy. Besides, with the discounts, the cost is really not that much more.

In any given year, with the thousands of acres CMA scouts, we usually still go with the old rule of thumb that 5 to 10% loss of planted seed is acceptable and "the norm". If a variety had only a 90% germination rate then we would expect a lower live count or higher percent loss. So a planted population of 35,000 would have a live count of around 31,000-32,000.

Every year, our staff notices and receives calls on lower-than-normal populations in cornfields, and so begins the process of elimination of variables to determine the cause. We always cover the variety, fertilizer type/rate, tillage type, planting depth, soil/weather conditions, seed treatment/insecticides, and insect pressure. What has changed, and we started taking note in 2012, was the pressure from insects, especially underground insects. Why is this affecting our "full traited corn"? Aren't we fully protected from every species all season long?

Apparently not! We have discovered, after looking into the issue and working with different seed company agronomists, that not all seed treatments are the same, and not all trait packages cover the full spectrum of soil insects. For instance, there are two major seed treatments on corn. One does better in dry soils, and the other in wet soils. So, depending on the characteristics of the year or the individual field, one may work better for control. So the question remains, how do we know which to order (high or low rate) and are various options available on the specific corn varieties desired?

Also, some insects have been removed from treatment labels altogether and others have levels of acceptable pressure while still being considered controlled. Insects that have become a problem are corn borer, wire-worm, seed corn maggot, white grubs, other species of grubs, and, as always, our old friend the corn root-worm. These are all underground species that generally go unnoticed and low corn populations are then blamed on the conditions, planter, or spray program.

Our recommendation to some growers who encountered these problems in 2012 was to add a liquid insecticide in the pop-up units (in furrow), or to go back to using a granular insecticide and insecticide boxes. This did seem to improve control in 2013, and more farms will be going in this direction in 2014. We are not recommending this for every farm, but situations that arise need to be reviewed. The question still remains then of when, where, how, and why for insects.

These are tough questions, and we do not have all the answers. It is a starting point for a detailed discussion with your crop consultant, and your seed dealers. Conversation points should include rotations, type of seed treatments (high or low rates, what options are available on specific varieties), whether additional insecticide is necessary, the types of insects that are fully controlled versus partially controlled, and the rationale for corn borer traits or rootworm control. When all is said and done, you may decide that you are further ahead going back to a Roundup Ready variety with low rate treatment and using a soil insecticide.

The bottom line is that insects adapt, and we in the industry have to learn to adapt as well.

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Don Mitzel, Pesticide Advisory

The program to dispose of unwanted/unusable pesticides will be held this fall during the week of October 21, 2013 in DEC's Region 8 (counties covered by the Avon & Bath DEC offices). The exact date will be announced in the near future. Triple rinsed plastic HDPE (#2) pesticide containers will also be accepted for recycling. Application packets are available at our Warsaw office and any farm can participate in this if willing to drive to the location. I have been informed that there will also be a collection in Region 9 (Western Counties) next spring. There is **NO** cost to farms, so it's an excellent program to get rid of unusable pesticides!!

Don't forget to pick up the best side dish to any meal. Get your FRESH SWEET CORN



CONGRATULATIONS TO:

TOM FREDERES WHO IS NOW A CERTIFIED CROP PLANNER

&

WITHIN A YEAR'S TIME, WE HAVE HAD TWO OF OUR CROP TECHNICIANS BECOME CERTIFIED CROP ADVISORS

WAY TO GO JASON POST AND JOSH HARVEY!



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