

Anaerobic digestion can make British farmers green and affluent

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In uncertain financial times it is important for farming communities to find future investments that are cost saving and economically rewarding and the answer could be on their doorstep, writes Gareth Hill at Sauce Consultancy.

Anaerobic digestion (AD) has the potential to turn what was a cost into a cash cow. The value in organic waste has, until now, been locked away but the recent advent of proven new generation technology allows this waste to be converted into a resource.

AD converts its feedstocks such as manure and sewage into biogas which can be used as renewable energy in the form of heat and electricity. The vast technological improvements to these new facilities efficiency means it can compete with better known forms of green energy production.

AD has many advantages. It collects the strong greenhouse gas methane and converts it into a renewable energy that is carbon neutral, it also makes nitrogen in digestate more readily available as a plant nutrient compared to undigested slurry and can lower farm slurry odour by up to 80%.

Farming processes are easier as it kills many weed seeds meaning less herbicides, lowers pathogens in feedstock like salmonella and cattle prefer grass spread with AD digestate.

On the continent, many farmers have diversified into renewable energy production with little extra capital outlay once start-up costs have been covered. The financial returns can be substantial when biogas from AD is used to generate electricity and heat resulting in AD becoming many farmers highest income source.

The Government has been championing on-farm anaerobic digestion due to the environmental benefits and have provided numerous financial incentives; including "Double Renewable Obligation Certificates" (ROCs) whereby one megawatt produced earns one ROC.

The Community Renewable Energy North West conducted research finding that British



farmers using AD schemes could earn £20,000 pa, along with up to £16,300 for supplying materials and dividends.

So is it waste or resource? A cost or

source of income? Materials which contain a calorific value are no longer being seen as wasteful; anaerobic digestion could be the future for farming.

Remade South East has been assisting farms and horticultural businesses to find alternative ways to deal with their waste since 2001. Previous Remade schemes have included farm plastics recycling promotions and the application of 16,000 tonnes of municipal compost onto fruit and vegetable crops in Kent and East Sussex.

As part of the Remade South East's current business support services, Remade, in conjunction with Business Support Kent, is offering businesses in the South East a chance to receive subsidised training on the management of organic waste.

The EnviroSkills programme is developing new environmental skills for new markets. Through the EnviroSkills service, training providers across the South East are offering accredited short, practical business courses on environmental skills that are aimed at supervisory to senior management or professional level people. To take advantage of these developing market areas and to develop new business skills, companies are invited to apply for a limited number of subsidised places on an Organics Waste Recycling (1 day course).

This Level 3 course accredited by the Chartered Institute

Remade business support and organic waste training day

of Wastes Management gives an introduction to composting and the benefits of using compost in a variety of applications. The course will also cover marketing and compost end users, planning and licensing of composting sites and quality standards to produce compost. It will include a visit to a best practice composting site to show how compost is produced commercially. Normally the training cost would be £115. However the subsidised EnviroSkills cost is £15 per participant. The next training day will be held in September 2009.

A Food Waste training day is also currently being developed which will be available to businesses in the South East region.

The EnviroSkills Service Programme is co-financed by SEEDA and the European Social Fund.

For more details of the Organics and Food Waste training or to discuss a specific farm waste issue please contact Remade South East on 01732 876619.

