

MANTECA BULLETIN

Mixing methane & food waste

\$18.5M project key to one-two punch to improve environment

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Public Works Director Mark Houghton walks past one of Manteca's existing digester buildings at the wastewater treatment plant.

Digesters — a critical process of the wastewater treatment plant that currently serves nearly 90,000 people in Manteca and Lathrop — aren't exactly glamorous.

Manteca, though, is in the process of improving its digesters at the treatment plant north of the Big League Dreams sports complex to accomplish a cutting edge feat that no other city in the 209 is doing — the conversion of food waste into gas to power municipal garbage trucks.

The City Council last week put the \$18.5 million project out to bid. It is the biggest single public works undertaking in Manteca since the city participated in the construction of the regional surface water treatment plant on Dodds Road west of Woodward Reservoir.

It is a key component in the puzzle being put together to combine Manteca's food waste with methane gas from the treatment of wastewater to produce compressed natural gas to power nearly two dozen refuse collection trucks plus possibly have fuel left over to sell to the public.

In doing so the city will greatly reduce the need to burn methane gas created by the treatment process which in turn improves air quality and eventually eliminate burying food waste at landfills.

In one fell swoop, the city will meet two environmental mandates while reducing costs for operating refuse trucks. The city is in a position to undertake the project due to the decision more than 10 years ago to go with a state-of-the-art treatment process in a bid to get ahead of coming state mandates regarding wastewater. Also, the city is one of the few that has retained municipal control of day-to-day collection of solid waste or garbage instead of contracting it out to a private firm. It also will allow Manteca to process FOG — the acronym for fat, oil and grease — from restaurants and such. Currently it is shipped to a recycler in Oakland.

There is a good chance that other nearby jurisdictions such as Tracy may be sending their food waste to Manteca to meet the state mandate regarding landfill diversions allowing Manteca to produce even more compressed natural gas.

The city is also pursuing a filling station at the wastewater treatment plant off West Yosemite Avenue where the general public may eventually be able to buy liquefied natural gas for their vehicles equipped to operate on it.

Manteca is currently collecting food waste from several schools, restaurants and food operations in and around Spreckels Park and other locales in Manteca. Eventually it will be collected citywide. Commercial accounts and schools are placing food waste in separate containers.

When food waste recycling comes about for residential collections, what is placed in brown Toters and dumped into trucks will be taken to the Lovelace Transfer Station where a machine will separate food waste from everything else. The food waste will then be taken to the wastewater treatment plant for conversion into fuel.

Until the fuel conversion equipment is in place some 18 months to two years from now the food waste is being taken to Harvest Power in Lathrop for conversion into mulch.