



How Cows Will Help Heat a Vermont College Campus

By Christina Guessferd | Posted: Tue 5:52 AM, Aug 20, 2019 | Updated: Wed 11:57 AM, Aug 21, 2019



SALISBURY, Vt. (WCAX) Soon cows will help heat a local school campus. Tuesday, Middlebury College and its partners broke ground on a new facility on the Goodrich Family Farm in Salisbury. Our Christina Guessferd shows you how it will turn manure and food waste into renewable gas.

"This is a long day coming," said Chase Goodrich of the Goodrich Family Farm.

A project a decade in the making.

"What we have here is what's going to be the largest anaerobic digester probably east of the Mississippi, one of the largest in the United States," said John Hanselman, the CEO of Vanguard Renewables.

A facility that will house a digester which will turn 100 tons of manure and 180 tons of organic food waste into renewable gas every single day.

"This is a perpetual recycling facility," Hanselman said.

Vanguard Renewables developed the design. And construction is already underway.

By the end of the year, there will be two massive tanks. Those will create methane, which will then flow through pipelines to Middlebury College's main power plant.

It's all part of Middlebury's Energy 2028 plan, which includes a goal of using 100 percent renewable energy sources to heat and cool the campus. The digester will supply about half of that energy.

"Our mission statement says exist to help prepare students to deal with the world's most challenging problems, and climate change is arguably one of those challenges," said David Provost of Middlebury College.

When it's completed in 2020, the facility will be the first in the country to directly fuel a college campus.

"We feel if we're successful on this, this will open the door for other colleges and universities across the country to do similar projects," Provost said.

"We want to be good stewards for the land. We want to be good stewards to our animals. And it's really what we're all about in agriculture," Goodrich said.

Goodrich says this project will allow him to do both, while further connecting his dairy farm to the community. The digester will also heat the farm, create liquid fertilizer to reduce reliance on chemicals and cut down the farm's phosphorus levels and greenhouse gas emissions.

"I would just encourage farmers to tell their story," Goodrich said.

A story Goodrich says must include innovative partnerships to address the state's environmental issues from clean water to excess compost. Vanguard plans to collect food waste from surrounding communities for the project just in time for when the state's food waste ban goes into effect.

"I think it's really fortuitous," Hanselman said.