

Southington Plant Turns Food Waste to Energy, Owners Say There's Lot of Expansion Room

By DON STACOM | HARTFORD COURANT | JUN 17, 2019 | 10:30 PM | SOUTHINGTON



Connecticut could vastly expand the amount of food waste that it recycles into energy and fertilizer, the owners of Southington-based Quantum Biopower said Monday.

With the right tax incentives, the food-waste-to-energy industry could thrive in the state, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal said after touring the plant Monday.

"We have tax credits for other clean energy operations, and we've added some like solar and wind, sometimes one by one," Blumenthal said. "Most Americans - and most senators - have never seen a plant like this."

Quantum's plant currently processed about 40,000 tons of food waste every year, a small fraction of the 500,000 tons that Connecticut produces each year.

"This is the only one on the East Coast," Quantum Vice President Brian Paganini told Blumenthal, who is cosponsoring legislation to create federal tax incentives for operating food-waste-to-energy operations.

“A tax credit would help you and others,” Blumenthal told him. “There are incentives for solar, hydro, wind - food waste doesn’t have the same benefit. Here we have a treasure that makes productive use of food that people toss.”



Quantum Biopower Vice President Brian Paganini shows Sen. Richard Blumenthal where food waste is dumped into an underground mixer at the company's Southington plant. (Don Stacom)

Quantum started operations three years ago at its DePaolo Drive plant, where trucks arrive loaded down with past-expiration-date meats, flat soda, spoiled produce and the like. Metals, plastic and other packaging are extracted near the start of the process, and the food waste itself is slowly converted to methane gas inside massive holding tanks.

Inside the plant, the aroma of sour food is noticeable in some areas but not at all overwhelming. Outside, there is virtually no smell whatsoever; Quantum credits advanced air-scrubbing technology for that.

“Lake Compounce is right next to us and has no problem - in fact, they’re one of our customers,” Paganini said.

With the right tax incentives, the food-waste-to-energy business could thrive in Connecticut, according to Blumenthal, because restaurants, supermarkets and residents could be sending far more of the state's food wastes to processing plants like the one in Southington. Blumenthal said tax incentives for that type of business could vastly expand how much scrap food is diverted from the trash stream.

Food scraps dumped in landfills eventually release carbon, but that is not an issue at the Southington plant, Blumenthal noted.

Blumenthal is a co-sponsor of The Clean Energy for America Act which would address current insufficiencies in clean energy tax incentives by creating a simpler set of long-term, performance-based incentives for investments in food waste recycling.