

Alternative Energy Company in US Pig Manure Biogas Project

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AUSTRALIA - A private Australian company is making big inroads in the USA using methane from pig manure to produce energy.

According to ABC, Geopower Energy Limited has a joint venture interest in the largest biogas project of its kind in the world and sells carbon credits into the Californian trading scheme.

The methane from the Blue Mountains Biogas Project, Utah, is used to produce 3.2 megawatts of renewable energy that provides electricity to 3,000 homes.

The swine effluent comes from the largest piggery in the western United States, owned by Smithfield Foods, the worlds largest pork producer.

Geopower CEO Ben Mead says the process of harvesting methane has been used since the 15th century, albeit this is on a much larger scale.

"We take the waste from the farm and we pump it into a 100 million litre below-ground digester, basically a large covered lagoon.

"To give you a point of reference that's the equivalent of about 40 olympic sized swimming pools.

"We pump in 2.5 million litres of fresh manure a day, that's basically like putting one olympic sized pool in every day, and every day we pump out another 2.5 million litres.

"The digesters are kept at a constant temperature of 38 degrees centigrade, that's the temperature the naturally occurring bacteria is the happiest at.

"And as the bacteria breaks down the waste, it releases methane as a by-product."

Ben Mead says the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from the project is the equivalent of taking 20,000 passenger vehicles off the road every year.

The company is looking for similar renewable energy projects in the USA with other large corporate farming opportunities but stresses the need for guaranteed supply.

"We're really focused on very large opportunities where there are stable, long term farming operations, because the supply is what's critical; you need to ensure consistent supply."

Mr Mead says there's opportunities to develop smaller on-farm projects but Geopower is focused on large scale operations.

He says the company is speaking with a corporate farm in Australia about a similar project but says the two markets are quite different.

"The situation in Australia is difficult because the power pricing is actually quite low.

"I know a lot of people think their power bills are much higher than they should be but that's often a function of transmission and distribution costs.

"And there's a lot more uncertainty around carbon taxes and emissions trading."

But the Perth born Ben Mead says he's keen to develop an Australian project so he can get home more often.

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