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CalCAN's On-Farm Renewable Energy Bill Clears a Major Hurdle

On June 2nd, a CalCAN-sponsored bill was passed by the Senate with a strong bipartisan vote of 31-to-7. The Renewable Energy Equity Act (SB 489) is authored by Senator Lois Wolk.

SB 489 would allow all renewable energy types, including biomass and biogas, to participate in the state's Net Energy Metering (NEM) program, making it easier for those projects to get connected to the grid and help the state meet its renewable energy goals.

The bill would allow innovative farmers like Russ Lester of Dixon Ridge Farms in Winters to get their small-scale bioenergy projects connected to the grid, allowing them to convert agricultural waste to green energy. Russ, an organic walnut producer and processor, produces heat and power by converting walnut shells to energy. Here's what Russ emailed about this milestone:



"SB 489 moved out of the Senate with a 31-7 vote yesterday afternoon! This is fantastic bi-partisan support, virtually unheard of these days!"

The staff of CalCAN, Senator Wolk's office and Farm Bureau have made countless phone calls and personal contacts to show how SB 489 will help the state meet its energy goals. All supporters have been critical in moving this bill forward.

This bill will immensely help California to be able place hundreds, if not thousands, of small renewable generators throughout California. Thanks for all your help in trying to make this a reality.

Contacting your Assemblyperson will be key to moving forward. Senator Wolk thinks it is very helpful to show this support soon and often."

We urge you to contact your state Assemblymember to express your support for SB 489. Click [here](#) for more information and directions to call.

Climate & Agriculture Workshop for Ag Advisors



On May 12th, thirty farm advisors from NRCS, Cooperative Extension and RCD gathered at the Five Points Extension Station to learn about the relationship between climate change and agriculture.

Topics included the expected impacts of climate change on California agriculture, the farming systems showing the most promise for greenhouse gas reduction and carbon sequestration, and on-farm renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The workshop also included a tour by Scott Schmidt, farm manager of Farming D, a diversified conventional farm utilizing conservation tillage to increase climate benefits.

[Videos from the workshop](#) are available on the CalCAN website.

Putting Dairy Cows Out to Pasture: An Environmental Plus

[Full article](#) is available in the May-June 2011 issue of
USDA ARS Agricultural Research



New modeling work by an Agricultural Research Service team in University Park, Pennsylvania, suggests that a dairy cow living year-round in the great outdoors may leave a markedly smaller ecological hoofprint than her more sheltered sisters.

Agricultural engineer Al Rotz led a team of scientists at the ARS Pasture Systems and Watershed Management Research Unit through a modeling study that evaluated how different management systems on a typical 250-acre Pennsylvania dairy farm would affect the environment. "If we try to reduce one environmental factor in this complex production system, we can end up increasing others," Rotz says. "So there's a real need to look at all the environmental aspects together."

The researchers found that total emissions for the greenhouse gases methane, nitrous oxide, and carbon dioxide were 8 percent lower in year-round outdoor production systems than in the high-production confinement systems. The biggest payoff? Keeping dairy cows outdoors all year lowered ammonia emissions by about 30 percent.

Keeping cows outdoors also helped reduce fuel use and the

resulting carbon dioxide emissions from farm equipment, because producers didn't need to plant and harvest as much feed for their livestock. Average net farm greenhouse gas emissions dropped about 10 percent by keeping the herd outdoors year-round. When fields formerly used for feed crops were converted to perennial grasslands for grazing, carbon sequestration levels climbed from zero to as high as 3,400 pounds per acre every year.

"The carbon sequestration benefits really add up," Rotz says. "When farmland is transitioned from rotated crops to perennial grassland, you can build up lots of carbon in the soil and substantially reduce your carbon footprint for 20 to 30 years."

The scientists also calculated the carbon footprint left behind by cows in each of the four management systems for every pound of milk produced. They found that a well-managed dairy herd kept outdoors year-round left a carbon footprint 6 percent smaller than that of a high-production dairy herd kept in barns.

Organic Transitions Funding

The deadline for applying for a USDA Organic Transitions Program (ORG) grant is June 30, 2011.

The overall goal of ORG is to support the development and implementation of research, extension and higher education programs to improve the competitiveness of organic livestock and crop producers, as well as those who are adopting organic practices. In FY 2011, ORG will focus on environmental services provided by organic farming systems that support soil conservation and contribute to climate change mitigation. Practices and systems to be addressed include those associated with organic crops, organic animal production (including dairy), and organic systems integrating plant and animal production.

Eligible applicants include: public and state controlled institutions of higher education , private institutions of higher

education , and others.

For more details see Grants.gov.

**CalCAN Ranch Field Day:
"The Climate Benefits of Grassfed Beef Ranching"**



**Save the Date
July 29, 2011
TomKat Ranch in Pescadero, CA
Details to follow**

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