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Vegetable-waste power plant gets federal funds

Staff

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A project to contribute to Ontario's power grid using electricity from artificially digesting vegetable waste has picked up a contribution from Ottawa.

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The federal government said Friday it will put up a repayable contribution of up to \$1.6 million for Seacliff Energy to build a cogeneration facility using vegetable waste, from local farms and greenhouses, as its fuel.

"Local farmers, greenhouse producers and vegetable processors will now have a better way of disposing of waste and a less expensive, richer source of fertilizer from the facility," Ontario MP Dave Van Kesteren said in a release.

Seacliff Energy's project is an anaerobic digestion facility to transform vegetable waste from local farms and greenhouses into electricity that can be sold to the Ontario power grid, into heat that can be sold to greenhouses, and into organic matter that can be sold as natural fertilizer.

The company expects to have its facility operating this fall and to be generating about \$2 million in annual revenue for Seacliff by 2010.

"Fuel costs have killed us in the last few years and we're looking forward to a less expensive, more consistent and greener source of heat and energy," said Dennis Dick, a Seacliff partner and owner of the adjacent Pelee Hydroponics greenhouse at Leamington.

"Everywhere you look there are benefits. We get organic, nutrient-rich fertilizer from the digester and the waste from our greenhouse will be fed back into the digester."

Cow's stomach

The two-stage agriculture biodigestion technology is a "Canadian first," the government said, describing the digestion process as somewhat like a cow's stomach: working in stages, breaking down up to 40,000 tonnes of waste, consisting of up to 50 types of material, by using different bacteria and temperatures.

The single-stage digesters currently used in Canadian municipal landfills work more slowly and they can generally only break down one type of waste at a time, the government said.

Seacliff said it will collect waste such as manure from dairy cattle and swine, cucumbers and cucumber prunings, and corn silage.

The digestion process, the company said, will generate enough biogas and thermal heat to operate Pelee Hydroponics' adjacent cucumber and tomato greenhouse. Seacliff would then sell excess electricity to the Ontario power grid, and local corn growers have said they'd buy the natural fertilizer, or "digestate," left over from

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the process.

The project is also expected to reduce the need for expansion of municipal landfills, which now serve the proliferation of food processing plants in the area, the government said.

Ottawa also said it's hoped the project will pave the way for similar facilities to be introduced into individual farms and local communities. Within a 50-km radius there are 10,000 acres of greenhouses and five major food processing plants.

Furthermore, Seacliff's project is also expected to remove the equivalent of 5,217 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, based on the CO2 produced by all parties involved.

The funding for the project will flow through the Agri-Opportunities program, a five-year, \$134 million program launched in 2007 and meant to help generate demand and increase opportunities for Canadian ag products.

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