

PRESS PHOTO/CORY OLSEN

**Back to the soil:** The byproduct, after methane is turned into electricity, is a fertilizer. It is used for growing feed corn at the 2,500-acre Scenic View Dairy near Hamilton.

# Cow pies to power

## FARM PRODUCES ELECTRICITY, IS LEFT WITH FERTILIZER

BY MYRON KUKLA  
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

HAMILTON — Three times a day, workmen at Scenic View Dairy LLC, scrape cow pies from the cement pads behind milking stations to turn them into electricity.

That's right, electricity.

In addition to the 20,000 gallons of milk the dairy in Manlius Township produces daily, it also generates electricity from the methane gas extracted from about 60,000 gallons of manure droppings produced by 1,900 cows.

On an average day, the farm's methane-to-electricity system can churn out 125 to 200 kilowatts of electric per hour, or up to 3,000 kilowatts daily.



**Norma McDonald**

The electricity is sold to Jackson-based Consumers Energy Co. via a connection to its Belknap substation.

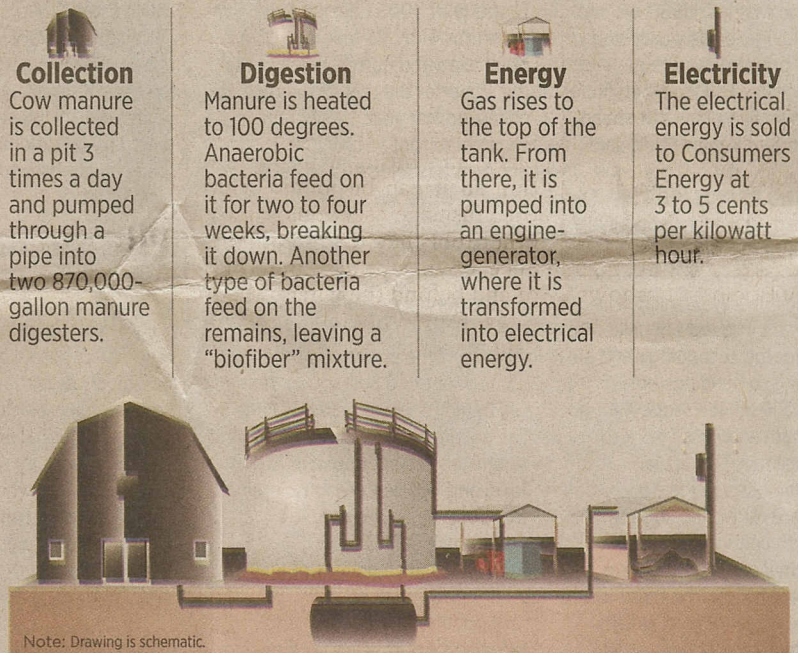
"We're producing four-to-five times the electricity needed to run the farm, so the surplus is sold to Consumers for 3 to 5 cents per kilowatt-hour," said Norma McDonald, operating manager for Phase III Development & Investment, which installed the \$2.9 million system.

After the energy process, the organic, odorless nutrient is used for fertilizer for farming and gardening.

"The biosolids at the end of the process come out like sawdust and can be spread on fields or made into pellets for retail horticulture sales," she said.

### Cow power

Methane digesters at Scenic View Dairy turn cow manure into needed electricity and help farmers comply with stricter federal regulations. Here is how the digesters work.



SOURCES: Associated Press; Scenic View Dairy

"We use it here for bedding for the cows instead of sand, which has produced another savings for the farm."

McDonald said the methane-to-electricity system covers the rural Hamilton farm's 700 kilowatt-hour daily needs and leaves about 2,000 kilowatts for resale. She estimates payback on the system will take five to seven years.

The farm is owned by Mike Geer-

lings and partner Mark Lucas, who see the system as a way to reduce operating costs while making the operation fossil-fuel free.

"We think alternative energy sources is the wave of the future, and it's our best interest as a business to save money and energy through what is a renewable resource on a dairy farm," Lucas said.

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