



1616 P Street, NW
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20036
T +202.683.2500
F +202.683.2501
foodandwaterwatch.org

Say NO to biogas in Delaware

Dear Governor Carney,

In Delaware, the company Bioenergy DevCo wants to create a green-washed nightmare by constructing and operating an anaerobic digester on the site of a compost plant in Seaford. The company has already signed a 20-year contract with Perdue Farms to accept waste from poultry-processing plants throughout Delmarva and convert it into explosive biogas, which is primarily methane, for sale via regional pipelines. The company now seeks similar contracts from other poultry integrators within the region.

Biogas and biogas production cause health and environmental problems

Worldwide, biogas is being promoted as “renewable” energy and a solution for water pollution. But burning biogas releases carbon dioxide and other pollutants including smog-forming nitrogen oxides, ammonia and hydrogen sulfide, potentially offsetting other greenhouse gas reductions. Methane itself is a greenhouse gas 90 times more potent than CO₂.

But gas isn't all that the digester would produce. It would also leave behind hundreds of thousands of tons of concentrated, highly water-soluble by-product, which the industry calls “digestate.” This digestate would be sold as fertilizer, and spread onto the region's fields, from which it would run off into waterways and the aquifer, further exacerbating the pollution that has rendered more than 90 percent of Delaware's waterways unfit for swimming or fishing.

Biogas infrastructure will incentivize poultry industry expansion

Construction of this facility will not, as its proponents claim, solve the problem of poultry industry pollution in Delaware and the region. Instead, it will create another revenue stream for the industry, and incentivize the creation of more waste. Ultimately, we believe this biogas scheme will result in the expansion of the poultry industry in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. That expansion would come at the expense of the region's air and water quality, as well as the health of the Chesapeake, Delaware, and Inland Bays.

Biogas site is serious environmental justice concern

The site of the proposed plant is also problematic. The community surrounding the site is home to people of color and people living in poverty at about twice the rate as Sussex County as a whole. To operate a dirty gas refinery in their midst is simply unjust.

Biogas operations require dangerous truck traffic

Traffic is yet another concern. Each year, the proposed methane plant would require the delivery of hundreds of thousands of tons of poultry plant waste and the removal of hundreds of thousands of tons of byproduct. The plant would also be the starting point for truckloads of explosive methane bound for the Chesapeake Utilities pipeline. The truck traffic to and from the Bioenergy DevCo refinery would inconvenience and endanger Delawareans.

The approval process has been less than transparent

The fight against this horrendous proposal has faced significant interference from a Sussex County government that has resisted transparency every step of the way. At first, the county intended to green light this new use for the property near Seaford without a conditional use permit. Next, the county government intended to proceed without public hearings. Pressure from activists changed both of those plans, but Sussex County Council proceeded to approve a conditional use permit for the project -- despite more than 300 comments in opposition. The county also held a meeting of its Industrial Revenue Bond Committee that no one outside of the county government knew to attend. During that 15-minute meeting, the IRBC recommended that the county approve up to \$60 million in tax-exempt bonds to help fund construction of the digester. County council approved those bonds unanimously, without public comment or debate.

State-level review skipped before county approval

A thorough Preliminary Land Use Service (PLUS) review might have raised more red flags about the proposed methane plant, but Bioenergy DevCo did not submit its plans to the state prior to seeking a conditional use permit from the county. Subsequent to the county's approval, however, the company revealed plans for a larger facility than what Sussex County considered. We believe that if Bioenergy DevCo had been forthright about its intentions prior to and during the county process, a PLUS review would have been triggered automatically.

Biogas is a false solution to the climate crisis

As the threats of global climate change and fossil fuel dependence are increasingly felt worldwide, we do not have time to entertain false solutions like biogas. Investing in natural gas infrastructure and factory farm-linked biogas shifts critical resources away from efforts to reduce emissions and develop truly renewable energy. Instead, it is time to invest in a just transition to a 100 percent, zero emission, clean energy future.

Please oppose biogas infrastructure development

We respectfully request that you direct DNREC not to permit the project for the reasons we explained above and those provided through public comments. Additionally, we ask that you oppose all buildout of biogas infrastructure including, but not limited to:

- * tax incentives or other forms of public support for the expansion of animal waste-based biogas,
- * the inclusion of animal waste-based power in the Delaware Renewable Portfolio Standard's definition of

renewable energy and in renewable energy credit or incentive programs,

* the award of renewable energy grants or loans for the construction of anaerobic digesters or digesters that rely on the industrial livestock or poultry industry,

* and new gas pipeline construction.

We thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration and action.

Signed,

Groups that have signed on:

Delaware

- Protecting Our Indian River
- Community Housing & Empowerment Connections Inc.
- Delaware Environmental Justice Community Partnership
- Plant Powered Delaware
- Delaware Action for Animals
- Sierra Club Delaware Chapter
- Delaware Civil Rights Coalition
- Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice
- SHEN (Sussex Health & Environment Network)
- Central Delaware NAACP Branch
- UFCW Local 27
- Progressive Democrats for Delaware
- Surfrider Foundation Delaware Chapter
- Miss Delaware 2021
- Delaware Concerned Residents for Environmental Justice
- Delaware Hispanic Commission
- Fridays for Future Delaware
- Delaware Working Families Party

Maryland

- Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church Environmental Justice Committee
- Chesapeake Climate Action
- Maryland Legislative Coalition
- Greenbelt Climate Action Network
- Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
- Assateague Coastal Trust
- Howard County Climate Action
- Sentinels of Eastern Shore Health

Regional

- Delaware Riverkeeper Network



- New Castle Presbytery
- Human Farming
- Animal Humane
- Advocates for a Clean Lake Erie
- Public Justice Food Project

National

- SRAP (Socially Responsible Agriculture Project)
- Center for Food Safety
- Food & Water Watch