Waste? Not! (4212)

By Jeff Reinke

In light of the somewhat overwhelmingly negative economic news that we've all been inundated with, I found it refreshing when a release to the contrary came across my computer screen. More specifically, it referenced a $160 million investment involving the construction of eight biogas plants stemming from a strategic alliance between Sanimax and StormFisher Biogas.

Oversimplifying the roles of both companies, Sanimax will collect the animal and food by-products, while StormFisher will handle more of the operational and distribution aspects of biogas production, which is converted to energy for heating homes and providing electricity. Additionally, those items that cannot be used in this process are transformed into fertilizer for agricultural use.

So while most look upon things like pond scum, or in this instance meat fat and potato peels, as anything but an opportunity, our marketplace is actually investing significant resources in obtaining and processing these materials to help answer our society's growing need for energy sources. In light of the cutbacks, downsizing and exporting of labor prevalent throughout the manufacturing marketplace as a whole, the processing industry stands out as it re-invests in itself and provides significant benefits as a result.

Although it's impossible to overlook how these new facilities will reportedly offset the equivalent of 120,000 tons of exhausted carbon dioxide, and divert 500,000 tons of organic by-products in creating enough energy to power 20,000 homes annually, what's also impressive is that they will breathe new life into local economies via jobs the plants will have created and the tax base they will strengthen.

So the benefit is double-edged, and offers perspective on how innovative investments in the processing industry not only better the lives of those needing the product being generated, but also stimulate economic growth within our marketplace.

I'm not naïve enough to think that these developments are purely in the interest of job creation and environmental preservation. I know both of these companies are looking for a substantial return on their investment, but it's one that they both deserve. In a time when banks and investors alike are being criticized for poor financial judgment, our marketplace continues to set an example for all to emulate.

The quest towards new power sources and feedstocks is pushing the marketplace forward, and as a result, requiring new and innovative equipment and products for these applications. So while we're in a tough economic period, it has not scared many in the processing field from investing in new ways to become more innovative

and profitable. Hopefully the same can be said of you and your facility.

On the wall in my office, hanging beside a wonderfully colorful picture of a dinosaur painted by my daughter, is an Apple Computers ad from the October 1, 1997 edition of the Wall Street Journal. Part of it reads:

"Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. You can praise them, disagree with them, quote them, disbelieve them, glorify them or vilify them.

"About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They invent. They imagine. They explore. They create. They inspire. They push the human race forward."

Good luck to you in your "crazy" efforts as you push the processing marketplace, and its benefactors, forward through innovative and timely investments in your plant and its capabilities.

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