

# We Can't Let This Gas Greenwash Polluting Factory Farms

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Despite what the industry says, factory farm gas isn't clean, green, or renewable. Here's what's at stake for our communities and the climate.

Big Ag has a big waste problem. Every day, factory farms produce millions of tons of manure and other waste, threatening our air, water, and climate.

In recent years, a new industry has grown by claiming it will solve this problem. Factory farm gas companies promise to turn all this waste into a "green" energy source. It seems like a neat fix: it creates energy without fossil fuels, and a way to put that waste to good use. Industry backers say it's a "win-win" — but they don't tell you who loses.

Gas from factory farms actually *hurts* the climate more than helps it. It won't solve the industry's waste problem; in fact, it will entrench that problem by encouraging more factory farms. And it will further endanger environmental justice communities that have long suffered from factory farm pollution.

## Factory Farm Gas Is a Dirty Energy Source

Despite what boosters will tell you, using factory farm gas for energy is similar to fossil fuels in a lot of ways. For one, burning it releases CO<sub>2</sub> and other pollutants like ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and smog-forming nitrogen oxides.

Moreover, gas facilities can continuously emit methane when they store digestate in open tanks. When the gas leaves those facilities, we can count on even more emissions. That's because it's transported through the same supply chains and infrastructure as fracked gas. This infrastructure — from pipelines to home hookups — leaks huge amounts of methane.

Expanding factory farm gas means entrenching and expanding this dirty infrastructure. It also creates new sources of climate-wrecking methane emissions. And, by tying the factory farm model to dirty energy production, expanding gas will double down on both.

Factory Farm Gas 101

### **Where does factory farm gas come from?**

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Factory farm gas starts with the waste of factory farms. This waste includes the manure, urine, blood, feathers, and whatever else collects in a hog, dairy, or poultry facility. It also includes loads of antibiotics, pathogens, and chemicals. . . . and animal growth hormones



Factory Farm Gas 101

### **How does the waste turn into gas?**

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That waste is processed in an anaerobic digester, an oxygen-less tank or lagoon where microorganisms “eat” the waste. They leave behind a mixture of gases that can be burned for energy, as well as some leftovers. These leftovers are concentrated solids called “digestate.”



Factory Farm Gas 101

### **How does industry use the gas?**

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Factory farm gas can be refined and used in the same ways that we use fracked gas. In fact, factory farm gas and fossil gas are both primarily methane — a climate pollutant with 80 times the warming impact of carbon dioxide. Gas from factory farms can be shipped via pipeline and used in homes and power plants, in the same ways that fossil gas is.



## Factory Farms Worsen Our Manure Problem

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Livestock waste is a huge source of pollution in the United States. Most pig and dairy farms store their untreated waste in open-air lagoons. These lagoons increase methane emissions and send harmful pollutants like ammonia and hydrogen sulfide into the air.

Factory farm waste is also one of the biggest sources of nitrogen and phosphorous pollution in our waterways. That pollution can make water undrinkable and cause algae blooms that kill aquatic life en masse.

Many of these hazards stem from the common industry practice of spreading untreated waste on fields. The untreated waste, full of toxic chemicals and pathogens, runs off of fields and into waterways.

Despite industry claims, digesters don't actually fix these problems. In fact, they're more likely to worsen them.

Digesters don't eliminate or even reduce factory farm waste. They extract the methane but leave behind digestate, which is just the manure and other pollutants in an even more concentrated, solid form. Digestate gets spread on fields just like liquid waste, causing much of the same health and environmental problems.

## Factory Farm Gas Doubles Down on Threats to Environmental Justice Communities

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When companies build factory farms, they bring all their pollution and a host of health hazards with them. Factory farm pollution is linked to respiratory conditions, reduced lung function, elevated blood pressure, waterborne illnesses, and more.

These impacts disproportionately endanger low-income communities and communities of color. Companies know that these communities don't have the resources or political clout to stop them from setting up shop.

For example, a proposed factory farm gas facility in Sussex County, Delaware, threatens an already disadvantaged area. Folks living in a three-mile radius of the facility are 32% people of color, compared to 17% in the county as a whole. About a third of folks in that area experience poverty, compared to 12% for the whole county.

## **How We Pay for Factory Farm Pollution**

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Digesters are hugely expensive, and most aren't financially viable without taxpayer subsidies. In recent years, state and federal governments have offered a windfall of public funds to encourage more digesters on factory farms.

In 2022, factory farm gas became eligible for federal investment tax credits for renewable energy. The recent Inflation Reduction Act authorized almost \$2 billion in public funds to subsidize rural "clean energy" efforts, including factory farm gas. The Biden administration's Methane Emissions Reduction Plan includes public-private partnerships for factory farm gas.

At the same time, states like Maryland and California have subsidized factory farm gas through renewable energy programs. By declaring this gas "renewable," they've sent millions of taxpayer dollars to factory farms and developers.

In all these cases, dirty industries benefit from money that *should* be going to truly clean, green, and renewable energy.

What's more, these programs don't incentivize responsible manure management or encourage farms to minimize their waste. Instead, they incentivize *more* waste, as well as bigger, more consolidated factory farms.

## **We Don't Need Factory Farm Gas — We Need to End Factory Farming**

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Factory farm gas doesn't solve the industry's waste problem; it just makes new ones that will keep burdening and sickening frontline communities.

This industry doesn't address the problem at its source. We could much more effectively reduce factory farm pollution (including climate pollution) with better waste management practices — or, better yet, by shutting down factory farms.

A growing factory farm gas industry incentivizes *more and bigger* factory farms, and more waste. It will lead to more climate-wrecking methane, more dirty gas infrastructure, and more pollution for fenceline communities.

We can't let this dirty industry lie and sway our elected officials. We need to stop new projects, end subsidies, and redirect support to real renewable energy, like solar and wind.

**Don't let industry greenwash this gas. Spread the word to your friends!**