

Fueling the methane discussion



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In high school, one of my science fair projects showed how to collect methane off of manure. I don't remember all the details, but it wasn't complicated: Tin can full of manure. Balloon on top. Time. As the methane was emitted, the balloon enlarged.

Back then, we weren't looking at methane as a bad thing. We were looking at it as a possible energy source. Could we capture the methane from the output of our cattle and pigs to provide the energy needed to operate the farm?

Change in favor

Methane is getting a bad rap these days as one of the greenhouse gases (GHG) contributing to global warming and climate change. The fact that it is more efficient at trapping heat in the atmosphere makes it especially onerous to those pushing a climate agenda. We're all going to learn a lot more about these subjects in coming years. As some politicians and self-appointed gurus urge the elimination of beef production as a way to stop climate change, it's important we understand and support the science that provides a full picture. We'll be delving into more of this in future issues, but for starters:

- ▶ The Oklahoma Beef Council put out a great post we shared on our Facebook page: "According to research published in the *Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences*, if all livestock in the United States [were] eliminated and every American followed a vegan diet, greenhouse gas emissions would only be reduced by 2.6%, or 0.36% globally, and would lead to an increase in synthetic fertilizer use and increased soil erosion." Learn more at beefitswhatsfordinner.com/raising-beef/sustainable-diet-faq.
- ▶ Frank Mitloehner, of the University of California–Davis, says agriculture and forestry are the only sectors of society that can actually reduce greenhouse gases by pulling them out of the air. The plants we grow intake carbon dioxide and turn it into oxygen and food and fiber. Common sense would reason that the livestock we graze keep that forage in a vegetative state, which increases the ability of the landscape to reduce GHGs.
- ▶ Mitloehner points out that the methane emitted by cows is actually recycled. It's part of what he describes as the biogenic carbon cycle. The plants pull the atmospheric carbon dioxide from the air to produce the foodstuff the cow eats. The cow emits methane during digestion. That methane, he says, hangs in the air about 12 years before being broken down into carbon dioxide and returned to the atmosphere to continue the cycle. As long as herd emissions remain constant for that 12-year period, no additional methane is added to the atmosphere. Find out more at <http://bit.ly/ABB-stakes1>.
- ▶ In the United States, improved genetics and production practices have allowed us to actually reduce the cow herd while maintaining the amount of beef produced, lowering the industry's methane output per pound of beef produced.
- ▶ Other research is developing ways to reduce the amount of methane produced in the beef production system through, for example, the use of feed additives.
- ▶ Circling back, we can burn methane as fuel. According to SoCalGas, "Methane provides a great environmental benefit, producing more heat and light energy by mass than other hydrocarbon, or fossil fuel, including coal and gasoline refined from oil, while producing significantly less carbon dioxide and other pollutants that contribute to smog and unhealthy air." So, if we burned some of the methane our cows produced, wouldn't that make cows even better for the environment than we thought?

I'm a firm believer that the Good Lord has created this planet in a way to provide us what we need when we need it, and that agriculture is the climate solution, as well. However, we need to be aggressive in sharing just how agriculture is the solution before "anti-meat" agendas lead the "climate" discussion a direction we don't want to go. |

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