

# Consumers Energy Expands Agricultural Services

## Customer Feedback Results in Enhancements

**To** HELP FARMERS meet their daily energy needs, Consumers Energy has expanded services offered by its agricultural services department.

The changes and new services were established as a result of feedback from the farming community on how they could be better served.

“We want our agricultural and farming customers to know we heard you,” said Jim Baisden, spokesman for Consumers Energy’s Agricultural Services

Department. “Our mission is to be the single source for farmers’ energy needs at no additional cost.”

Each of the company’s agricultural customers will be assigned an account manager or agricultural services analyst who will help with any concerns.

Whether it’s offering expertise on billing issues, lowering the installation costs for an irrigation system or helping lower energy costs for grain driers, Consumers Energy is ready to help.

Farmers may call 1-800-805-0490 for help with their energy needs or to learn more about the additional services. An employee from Consumers Energy will return the call within one business day.

“We are here to provide understanding and a process to maintain and improve the safety and reliability of our electric systems and services,” said Baisden. “We are committed to being a trusted partner in the farming communities we serve – and we intend to keep that commitment.”

“We are branching out in how we service our customers at no additional cost.” -**Jim Baisden**

Consumers Energy’s Ag Services Department

### Areas supported by the new agricultural services department include:

- New irrigation requests;
- New natural gas service requests;
- Free stray voltage electrical inspections;
- Advisement on equipment needs;
- Direct access to a agricultural business account manager; and more.

For more information about agricultural services visit **ConsumersEnergy.com** or call **1-800-805-0490**

# Planning for the Future

**C**ONSUMERS ENERGY, in conjunction with Michigan State University, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michigan Farm Bureau and Michigan Economic Development Corporation conducted an educational forum last November to explore the role of anaerobic digesters in the Company's Renewable Energy Plan.

The Company announced plans to solicit proposals for anaerobic digester projects from agricultural operations, wastewater treatment facilities and food processing operations beginning this spring.

Currently, the Company purchases energy from four anaerobic digesters that use biodegradable material to create methane that is then used as a fuel in an engine to drive an electric generator. Anaerobic Digestion currently plays a small part of the Renewable Energy Plan – about 1 percent of the Company's Renewable Energy Credits come from Anaerobic Digesters. The solicitation will add another 1/2 percent.

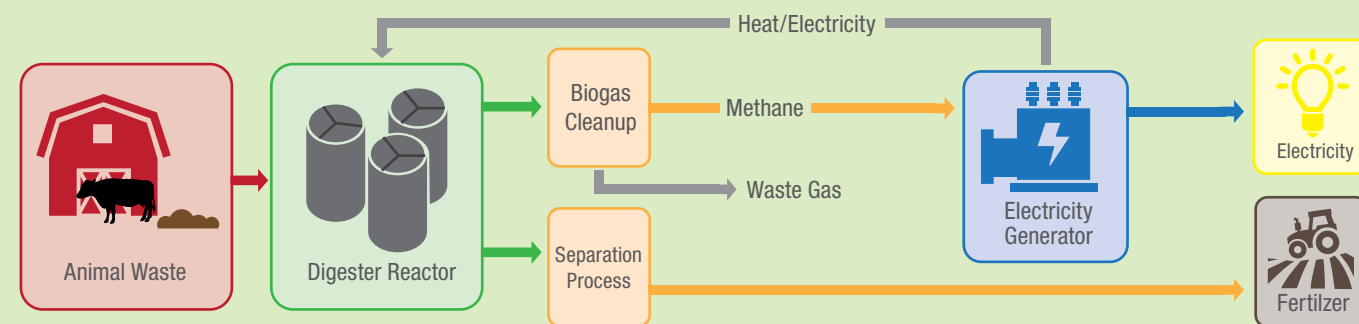
In addition to creating electricity the process also reduces solid and liquid wastes, reduce off site odors, improve water runoff quality, and provides building heating.

The Company's Experimental Advanced Renewable Program is expected to make use of an evaluation tool and waste inventory being developed by Michigan State University to assist developers optimize project characteristics to achieve competitive energy price targets. The forum introduced the evaluation tool and waste inventory in anticipation of its roll out in April.



Anaerobic digesters use biodegradable material to create methane that is then used as a fuel in an engine to drive an electric generator.

## How Does It Work: Anaerobic Digester



# MISS DIG

**T**HE MISS DIG law has undergone significant changes under the recently enacted Public Act 174. The changes go into effect this spring. The original MISS DIG law was passed in 1974 and requires that excavators contact the MISS DIG center three days before digging to request marking of underground utilities in the area of their excavation. MISS DIG then contacts the utilities to notify them that marking has been requested. Utility owners are required to mark the location of their buried facilities at no charge to the excavator. Excavators are required to hand expose the buried facilities if digging near the marks to determine the precise location. While these basic requirements are

**MISS DIG will provide a free membership to owners of farming property. This membership will allow the owners of farm property to receive all MISS DIG staking requests.**

unchanged under the new law, some of the details have been clarified.

The authors of the new law worked with the Ag Community to better define the MISS DIG requirements for excava-

tion activities used in farming.

There is a concern that routine farming operations such as plowing, though technically an "excavation", do not always require a call to MISS DIG for staking. However, this common sense notion needs to be balanced with the fact that utilities are extending further into rural areas and require protection. Routine farming operations do NOT include installation of drain tiles or wells. It is important to contact MISS DIG for these excavations at any location due to the risk of damage to buried facilities from these deeper excavations.

In order to assist farmers to be aware when buried utilities are being placed on or near their property, MISS DIG will provide a free membership to owners of farming property. This membership will allow the owners of farm property to receive all MISS DIG staking requests from others for excavations near their property. The details for signing up for membership are being developed.

Changes to the MISS DIG law go into

effect on April 1, 2014 (May 1, 2014 for those engaged in farming operations.) Please see Public Act 174 posted to the MISS DIG website ([www.missdig.org](http://www.missdig.org)) for complete detail of the new law.

**The revised law requires that those engaged in routine farming operations call MISS DIG to request staking unless one of the three items below are met:**

- Soil disturbance is in the public right of way (ROW) AND not deeper than 12 inches. There are no above grade structures such as phone pedestals within six feet of the activity.
- Soil disturbance is outside of public ROW and more than 25 yards from a pipeline. There are no above grade structures such as phone pedestals within six feet of the activity.
- Soil disturbance is outside of public ROW, within 25 yards of a pipeline but not deeper than 18 inches. There are no above grade structures such as phone pedestals within six feet of the activity.

## Knowing the Facts About Stray Voltage

**S**TRAY VOLTAGE is a term used to describe Neutral to Earth Voltage (NEV). NEV is a measurable level of voltage which may occur between a metal object and the adjacent floor or earth. It is often called stray voltage when measured between two points that can be simultaneously contacted by livestock.

Simply stated, voltage is the pressure that pushes electrical current through wiring systems, lights, and electrical equipment. When a person or animal feels a tingle or shock, the person or animal is actually feeling electrical current flowing through the body or portion of the body. Sometimes a condition within the wiring on a farm, the wiring

at a neighbor's property, or the power lines supplying a farm may cause the voltage between equipment and the adjacent earth or floor to increase to the point where it can be felt by an animal or person. This stray voltage can range from a slight tingling or burning sensation at a cut to an uncomfortable jolt for animals. If a person feels an uncomfortable jolt, the problem is probably not NEV but a serious problem with the wiring system or equipment.

**What can I do to help reduce my risk of having stray voltage on my farm?**

The most important thing you, as an owner, can do is properly maintain your wir-

ing system. Over time, your electrical equipment and wiring can become hazardous due to physical damage, corrosion, and overloading, especially in a farm environment. Having a qualified person inspect your equipment and wiring on a periodic basis is highly recommended. They can identify potential electrical problems that may be hazardous to your livestock and create future stray voltage issues.

**What is Consumers Energy doing to protect my farm from stray voltage?**

If you have a farm with livestock, chances are your electrical service has an isolated neutral. This neutral isolation is completed at the transformer

that serves your farm. There are more than 12,000 farms throughout the state that have a separated Neutral service. Our Agricultural Services department conducts thousands of inspections per year to ensure the neutral separations are maintained and working properly.

**How can I have my farm tested for stray voltage?**

Contact the Agricultural Services department at 1-800-252-8658 to schedule your free inspection.

To learn more about stray voltage visit the Rural Electric Resource Council's Web site: [www.Rerc.org](http://www.Rerc.org).

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## President Obama Signs Farm Bill at MSU

**P**RESIDENT OBAMA signed a \$956 billion farm bill on Feb. 7 at Michigan State University that covers a number of issues ranging from crop insurance to providing money for the nation's food stamp program.

"This bill supports businesses working to develop cutting-edge biofuels – like some of the work that's being done here at Michigan State," Obama told about 500 farmers and local officials at a horse barn at MSU. "That has the potential to create jobs and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. It boosts conservation efforts so that our children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy places like the Mississippi River Valley and Chesapeake Bay."

The bill was crafted by Debbie Stabenow, the Senate Agriculture Chairwoman and also a Democratic Senator from Michigan, along with Francus Lucas, a Republican Representative from Oklahoma, in a joint, bipartisan effort.

## Some of our services include:



New irrigation requests



Free stray voltage electrical inspections



New natural gas service requests



Advising clients on equipment needs

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