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## Bettina von Hagen

Bettina von Hagen is CEO of [Ecotrust Forest Management, Inc.](#)




## Why the Columbia Biogas facility is a good idea

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 Posted by [Bettina von Hagen](#) at 05:36

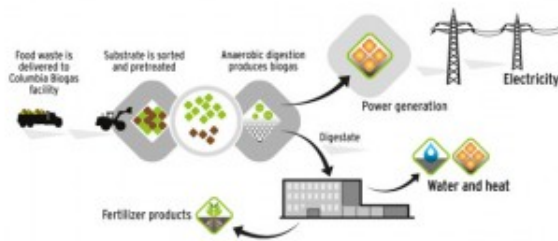
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Every day, all across the city, Portland's famed restaurants and breweries throw money and energy literally down the drain. Waste from these establishments, a mix of fat, sugars and other byproducts, is pumped into the city's sewer system or sent to landfills. In the case of larger breweries and beverage manufacturers, fees for waste disposal can cost tens of thousands of dollars per month.

A planned waste-to-energy facility by Columbia Biogas would turn this lost opportunity on its head. The plant, slated for Northeast Portland, would collect solid and liquid food waste from restaurants, grocery stores, processors and other commercial outfits around the city, unleash bacteria on the nutrient rich stew and create methane gas, fertilizer and purified water out the back end. The gas would produce enough electricity for 5,000 homes.



*Putting food waste to work*  
(image courtesy of Columbia Biogas)

The project, which is seeking city credit support to build the facility, has unfairly been drawn into the controversy over prior questionable spending of sewer and water fees. The irony is that Columbia Biogas' project actually benefits water and sewer users in the city.

Ecotrust has been closely involved in this project since 2010 as an advisor helping the company to access New Markets Tax Credit financing. (Full disclosure: a portion of our fees depends on the successful completion of full financing of the project.) We chose to support this project because it meets our criteria for the type of businesses that Portland and the Pacific Northwest needs. It creates long-term economic value, provides high-quality jobs and training, and produces renewable energy and other valuable products.

In the process, Columbia Biogas will reduce emissions associated with hauling waste to the landfill, reduce methane emissions in the landfill, and improve water quality in the region.

Biogas plants are built on proven technology; they're not risky bets. More than 6,800 operate in Germany alone, supplying 3% of the country's electricity and there over 100 here in the United States, in addition to the hundreds of municipal waste water treatment facilities that include anaerobic digestion as secondary treatment step.

After some 85 contractors work over a year to build the \$55 million plant in Northeast Portland, 20 technicians and plant operators will take up jobs at the facility. Columbia Biogas has committed to training workers from Northeast Portland's Cully Neighborhood, currently saddled with unemployment well above the national rate, to fill those jobs, and to providing assistance to help other low-income and disadvantaged people in the city secure and maintain jobs at the plant. The company has forged such strong relationships with the neighborhood that the neighborhood association has actively encouraged the City of Portland to find a solution to the plants' financing challenges.

In a changing energy landscape constrained by dwindling resources, with the climate morphing due to fossil fuel use, with the economy desperately in search of new ideas, we need to re-imagine energy creation and use. Thankfully, forward-thinking entrepreneurs and energy developers are working on innovative solutions. This project is everything we aspire for in a Portland business venture: innovative, smart, deeply committed to the public good, and — best of all — the more successful the company is, the greater the environmental and social benefits for all of us.

