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Columbia Biogas: A great opportunity for Portland

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Columbia Biogas



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Portland has a world-class reputation for the food and beer produced at its restaurants and breweries. Now the city has a chance to extend that reputation to how it manages the food waste these businesses produce. For the last two years, Columbia Biogas has been planning a Northeast Portland facility that will convert commercial food waste into renewable energy and sustainable fertilizer.

The project will save Portland businesses money, protect our environment and create badly needed jobs in an economically struggling neighborhood. It is exactly the type of smart, sustainable initiative we want in Portland. And that is why the project enjoys broad support from businesses and Cully neighbors alike.

[Daryl Maas with Farm Power Tillamook recently made claims](#) about the Columbia Biogas facility that are

inaccurate as to the plant technology, byproduct plan and financial feasibility. In making his claims, Mr. Maas failed to make the distinction between farm-based anaerobic digestion facilities and facilities designed to process both solid and liquid municipal food waste streams.

Mr. Maas' company builds and operates on-farm anaerobic digester facilities. On-farm facilities mainly process manure and other farm-related waste. The homogenous feedstock and rural location of on-farm facilities require far less sophisticated technologies compared to those needed to process municipal food waste from urban locations.

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John McKinney, is the president and founder of Columbia Biogas.

Mr. Maas' facility is approved to take in up to 15 percent off-farm food waste, but it is primarily using manure in the middle of a rural setting. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality permitted the Columbia Biogas facility to accept 100 percent food waste — all from the nearby businesses where it is generated.

The Columbia Biogas facility will use highly proven technology to recycle commercial and industrial food waste, grease trap waste and beverage waste into renewable power for up to 5,000 homes and multiple forms of sustainable fertilizer products. The facility is conveniently located in an urban area close to the source of the food waste to minimize transportation. It is designed with a state-of-the-art odor control system and includes an advanced pre-treatment process to remove contaminants such as packaging. All food waste will be received and processed within the enclosed building.

Columbia Biogas will also create 85 badly needed jobs during construction and another 20 long-term jobs once operations are underway. The company has worked closely with the Cully Association of Neighbors [to create a Good Neighbor Agreement](#) that others are touting as a model for how businesses interact with neighboring communities.

Columbia Biogas provides a local, sustainable disposal option for food waste much of which remains in our trash and is currently hauled hundreds of miles to distant landfills. In addition, fats, oils and grease from Portland's food establishments commonly end up in city sewer pipes where the fats congeal, leading to high maintenance costs and contributing to overflows which cost businesses and ratepayers money. It is neither economically, environmentally nor operationally sustainable to be hauling these wastes long distances to remote facilities which are not specifically designed for such materials.

With real environmental benefits and clear savings to the city, local businesses and ratepayers, this project is the kind of initiative ideally suited for the Portland community. In fact, [Bettina von Hagen at Ecotrust recently wrote about why this plant is such a perfect fit for Portland](#). Columbia Biogas is backed by proven technology, a sound business plan verified by third-party experts and a deep base of support.

[A recent study done by The Climate Trust and Energy Trust of Oregon](#) indicates that the biogas industry in Oregon has the potential to create at least 300 permanent full-time jobs and reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions by 800,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions. Biogas technology is ready for widespread implementation.

It is unfortunate that Mr. Maas feels the need to criticize others working to accelerate biogas development and help realize Oregon's biogas potential. He is ill-equipped to comment on a project of this sophistication and importance.