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Sacramento Group Rescues 40,000 Tons Of Food Waste, Turns It Into Fuel

Organic waste makes up about 30 percent of what's dumped into landfills

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In Sacramento, farm-to-table is a nice start, but it doesn't stop there. Once the food's consumed, it's then turned into fuel.

Created through a public-private partnership with the University of California, Davis and the Energy Commission, the Sacramento Biodigester is keeping leftovers out of landfills and converting them into fuel that can power school buses, waste disposal trucks and fleet vehicles, according to the California Energy Commission.

Altogether, it diverts 40,000 tons of food waste from landfills, according to Energy Vision.

It's a pretty sizable operation considering that organic waste makes up about 30 percent of what's dumped into landfills, according to CleanWorld, one of two companies that helped open the Biodigester.

"Farm to Fork to Fuel to Farm is an effort to turn what would otherwise be a waste stream – which is food waste – into a regional resource," Tim Taylor, of the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, told Yale Climate Connections.

When left to disintegrate in landfills, food waste breaks down and releases methane, a powerful heat-trapping gas.

Atlas Disposal Industries was also involved in opening the Biodigester and its fleet is powered by the waste that it hauls, according to Energy Vision.

The company collects organic waste from restaurants, supermarkets, food processing companies and households and brings it to Sacramento's South Area Transfer Station where it's converted. The waste undergoes a process called Anaerobic Digestion.

The machine consumes the organic waste and produces biogas, which is a mixture of mostly methane and carbon dioxide. The biogas is then refined and turned into renewable natural gas.

In addition to rescuing the food waste from landfills, it also cuts greenhouse gas emissions by 5,800 tons per year.

Within nine years, the county plans to divert all food waste from large producers.