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Analysis from the NGO Energy Vision Shows that Methane Emissions Reduction Efforts Should Prioritize Organic Wastes

[New York, NY – September 25, 2021] As the U.S. and the European Union pledge to cut methane emissions to fight climate change, analysis by the national sustainable energy non-profit Energy Vision shows that reducing emissions from organic wastes would cut methane more deeply and at lower cost than reducing emissions from the fossil fuel industry.

Last week at the Major Economies Forum, the US and the European Union [committed](#) to slashing methane emissions 30% below 2020 levels by 2030. In May, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) issued a landmark [Global Methane Assessment](#) which stated that cutting methane emissions is “the strongest lever we have to slow climate change over the next 25 years.” It found that drastically cutting methane emissions was necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change, and that anthropogenic (human-caused) methane emissions could be slashed by up to 45% in this decade. In recent legislation, as well as in the pending budget reconciliation package, Congress is allocating many billions for cutting methane emissions from the oil and gas industry. And in the coming weeks the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is expected to announce new, tighter regulations requiring oil and gas companies to find and fix methane leaks.

“Lowering methane emissions in the fossil fuel sector is critically important, but at the same time, policymakers need to understand that there are ways of cutting U.S. methane emissions that are much more efficient than plugging methane leaks in abandoned oil and gas operations,” says Energy Vision president Matt Tomich. “Our research shows that trapping the methane biogases from decomposing organic wastes could cut methane emissions more deeply and at much lower cost.”

Organic wastes can be processed in specialized tanks called anaerobic digesters. The digesters capture the methane biogases produced as the organic wastes decompose, preventing them from being released into the air and warming the climate. The biogases can then be refined into renewable natural gas, a low-carbon fuel which can displace carbon-intensive fossil fuels in everything from power plants to heavy-duty vehicles.

According to the California Air Resources Board, RNG is the lowest-carbon fuel available today. In fact, RNG which is made in digesters from food wastes and manures and used to displace diesel in vehicles, it is net carbon-*negative* over its lifecycle. That means more greenhouse gas emissions are captured in producing and using the fuel than are emitted by the vehicles running on it. RNG-powered vehicles surpass carbon neutrality, and Energy Vision’s research has found they have additional benefits, including proven reliability and low costs for heavy-duty vehicles such as trucks and transit buses.

Based on conservative assumptions, Energy Vision analysis finds that building digesters and producing RNG in them avoids greenhouse gas emissions at very low cost -- just \$16 per ton of CO2e (i.e. carbon dioxide equivalent) vs. \$67 per ton for capping abandoned oil and gas (AOG) wells. While both approaches reduce methane emissions, investing \$5.5 billion to develop 400 new RNG projects over the next five years could cut 33 million tons of CO2e a year — comparable to the amount saved by capping AOGs, but at a small fraction of the \$50 to \$100 billion cost. The \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill includes a 30% tax credit for building anaerobic digesters, which would further improve the economics of capturing and using these methane biogases.

“Our research indicates that organic wastes deserve top priority in U.S. methane reduction efforts,” said Tomich. “Cutting methane in the oil and gas industry is very important, but it only [accounts for 30%](#) of U.S. methane emissions. About 50% comes from agriculture and organic waste, including our vast livestock operations and waste decomposing in landfills, on farm fields and at wastewater treatment plants. Anaerobic digesters are a solution for mitigating those big methane sources rapidly and cost-effectively. Harnessing our vast organic waste streams is an immediate way to deliver on the US-EU methane pledge. Methane is the strongest lever for reducing warming in the next 25 years, and organic waste is the strongest lever for reducing methane.”

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NOTE TO EDITORS AND PRODUCERS: Matt Tomich and other expert sources are available for comment and interviews on request. To arrange an interview, or for more information and documentation, please contact Stephen Kent, skent@kentcom.com, 914-589-5988.

[Energy Vision](#) is a national non-profit organization committed to identifying and promoting the renewable and carbon-free energy and fuels strategies for a sustainable future.