

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Carbon neutral colleges

On Tuesday we discussed private sector efforts to recycle more plastic, which is one of the world's biggest pollutants when discarded. Used plastic containers mostly end up in landfills and incinerators. A lot of it finds its way to our oceans.

An even bigger problem is greenhouse gas emissions, which are building up in the atmosphere and warming the planet.

In 2015, scores of colleges and universities (including Montgomery County Community College) signed a pledge to become carbon neutral, that is, to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions from their campuses. The various colleges set different deadlines for themselves.

Of course, pledges are easy to make, and only seven schools, including two in Pennsylvania, have actually fulfilled their pledge so far.

Both Dickinson College in Carlisle and Allegheny College in Meadville reached carbon neutrality this year.

A prime example of creative thinking is a Dickinson initiative to generate electricity with gas created by a biodigester using food waste and other waste materials.

Dickinson owns an 80-acre organic farm which grows food for the campus and the local community. The farm serves as a laboratory for students to practice sustainable agriculture and renewable energy.

Until now, cow manure from the farm and food waste from the college cafeteria have been composted.

But starting next year, they will be processed in a 75,000 gallon biodi-

gester that will convert waste into gas which will run a generator powering the entire campus and its farm equipment, with enough excess amps to sell back to Met-Ed, the local electric company.

Other waste to be fed into the biodigester includes rubbish from the Carlisle Area School District, chaff from some local breweries, and milk byproducts from a local dairy.

The \$1 million project is being funded by grants, including \$300,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency, and the college.

When the digester is up and running next fall, it will reduce the college's overall carbon emissions by 120 metric tons annually.

Two years ago, Pottstown High School students conducted a study that calculated Pottstown students waste 79 pounds of food a day. Compare Pottstown's 3,300 students with more than 1.7 million students statewide, and you can see the mind-boggling amount of food waste in the state — just in our schools.

In fact, about a third of the food raised or prepared in America is thrown out for one reason or another, such as aesthetics or overestimating how much is needed.

There are scores of colleges and towns across the commonwealth that could replicate Dickinson's project and avoid thousands of metric tons of greenhouse gases annually.

Dickinson shows this isn't just theory. It can actually be done.



Commentary by  
Thomas Hylton



**COLLEGE FARM** — Dickinson College owns and operates an 80-acre organic farm which grows food for the campus and the local community.