



Quick Links

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“We want to do our part to produce renewable energy, increase sustainability and address climate change. Governor Brown made that a lot easier. We can finally get renewable energy projects like ours connected to the grid.”

-- Russ Lester

December 14, 2011

Helping Farmers Produce Clean Energy

In September, Governor Jerry Brown signed into law the Renewable Energy Equity Act ([SB 489](#)) that will make it easier and cheaper for farmers and food processors to connect “waste to energy” projects to the utility grid and cut their energy bills by generating their own homegrown clean energy. CalCAN sponsored this bill, which was carried by Senator Lois Wolk (D-Davis).

Now we need [your help](#) to put this law into action.

Every step in food production — from field to table — requires energy consumption and thus carries a carbon cost. In working toward a secure, decentralized food system we have to think about meeting those energy needs in secure, affordable, and local ways.

This idea is nothing new to farmers and ranchers for whom energy conservation is essential to their bottom line. More and more producers are looking for ways to become more energy efficient. Some conserve electricity by pumping less irrigation water. Some produce their own on-farm renewable energy to power farm operations and sell any excess back to the power company, providing a new source of income.

Russ Lester of [Dixon Ridge Farms](#) is an innovator of on-farm biomass production. Dixon Ridge grows organic walnuts and processes all of California’s organic walnuts. He’s also a member of CalCAN’s Farmer Advisory Council and was a tireless champion of our bill.



Russ used to sell his walnut shell waste to a large biomass facility. It was trucked away and burned to produce electricity. Several years ago, he installed a state-of-the-art gasification system to produce heat and power. The system turns his walnut shells (pictured in the banner photo above) into heat to dry the walnuts and

electricity to power his massive freezers, which he uses to replace chemical fumigants for killing insects, and to keep the walnuts fresh. He uses the biochar that remains as fertilizer in his orchards and to increase soil carbon sequestration, an added climate benefit.

Because the biomass facility at Dixon Ridge has not been eligible for the state's Net Energy Metering program, and because their local utility refused to connect them to the grid at a reasonable cost, the Lester's have been able to generate energy only when they can use it immediately. Now that our Renewable Energy Equity Act is law, Russ can be a part of California's clean energy future, increase his contribution to climate change mitigation, and get paid in electricity cost savings (spinning his meter backwards when he generates electricity), getting paid real money if he generates more than he needs.

At CalCAN, we are thrilled the governor signed the Renewable Energy Equity Act. It's an indication of his commitment to California's clean technology future. We can now turn our attention to ensuring that Russ' story is replicated.

With your help in 2012, CalCAN will work with leaders in the walnut and almond industries to explore the potential for more waste-to-energy projects. We will produce a case study of Russ' experiences and lessons learned, and we will host a symposium to share resources with farmers and processors on producing small-scale, distributed, clean energy from agricultural waste.

Please show your support for on-farm renewable energy with a [tax-deductible donation to CalCAN](#).

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