

CHEESE MARKET NEWS®

The Weekly Newspaper Of The Nation's Cheese And Dairy/Deli Business

Volume 26

August 18, 2006

Number 29

Money-, energy-saving tips for processors focus of series

By Hilary Parker

VICTOR, N.Y. — Today's dairy executives are facing the same challenge their predecessors faced: how to make more cheese with less money. But they're also having to do it with soaring energy costs and the threat of environmental litigation hanging over their heads.

In this story, the first in a several-part, year-long series on money- and energy-saving tips for cheese processors, *Cheese Market News* talks to one company about how it's helping processors spin straw into gold (or at least turn whey into fuel).

• Waste not, want not

Ecovation Inc., based in Victor, N.Y., makes a great case for its patented Mobilized Film Technology (MFT). How would you like to turn your whey into energy and make more product at the same time? No problem, says Diane C. Creel, chairman and CEO, Ecovation.

"Cheese waste is dense and strong, so it works great," Creel says. "And the fuel

we produce with it is so clean."

MFT has unique features that distinguish it from other anaerobic technologies, Creel continues. Through effective immobilization of the biomass, the system generates a large amount of bacteria that are available for waste treatment. Optimal integration of the biomass and wastewater allows for high-rate conversion of organics to energy, she explains. "In addition, the technology allows for maximum removal efficiency, resulting in improved effluent quality.

• The proof is in the cottage cheese

Ecovation has worked with a number of companies in the food and beverage industries. Its most recent dairy-related project is a MFT installation for CoolBrands International Dairy Inc. When CoolBrands purchased the North Lawrence, N.Y., facility from Kraft Foods last year, it set out to make yogurt and cottage cheese at the plant. But it knew it needed to change the way the plant disposed of waste byproducts.

CoolBrands officials turned to Ecovation, which set them up with a just-completed \$4.9 million project that both eliminates the need for landspreading and is expected to produce enough biogas to replace nearly 250,000 gallons of #6 fuel oil each year — roughly 30 percent of the plant's total energy usage.

"We strive to be a leader in our industry and being a responsible corporate citizen is an integral part of our company culture," says David Stein, president and CEO, CoolBrands. "We are extremely pleased to have found Ecovation's waste treatment system with the primary benefits of protecting the environment and producing renewable energy."

Now that the technology has been installed, CoolBrands officials also have found that they have increased throughput at the plant due to less bottlenecking at the separation and evaporation portion of the plant. According to Creel, CoolBrands now has the potential to increase the North Lawrence plant's yogurt

output by as much as 35 million pounds annually.

Ecovation officials also wrote and were awarded a \$500,000 renewable energy grant on behalf of CoolBrands from USDA's Rural Development program, which will help defray the costs of installing the system. With the energy savings as well as efficiencies realized when the landspreading operation was ceased, Ecovation expects MFT to save CoolBrands between \$500,000 and \$750,000 per year.

• Energy savings on wheels

If a potential customer still is not convinced of MFT's benefits, Ecovation officials say they will bring the technology to the customer so they can see for themselves. Ecovation has built a mobile MFT pilot for on-site waste stream testing.

"Once we get the opportunity to get close enough to a client for them to understand our technology, then it's very hard for them to turn it down because it offers such tremendous advantages," Creel says. CMN