

Xcel Investing in Manure Power

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Green energy has become one of the hottest buzzwords of 2009, but Xcel Energy is investing in brown energy on the high plains of Colorado. Brown, as in cow manure.

The Minneapolis-based utility announced this week that it has reached an agreement with a developer of renewable energy projects to buy natural gas from a plant northeast of Denver that will be used to power Xcel's Fort St. Vrain natural gas-fired electrical generating plant. The gas, the companies announced, will be produced from manure from a local dairy operation.

The technical explanation, according to Xcel: "An anaerobic digestion process [will] break down animal waste from a local dairy farm and other organic waste products, such as food processing residuals, from along the Front Range of Colorado. The waste stream will be converted to methane gas using the anaerobic digesters."

Construction of the new plant is scheduled to begin next year. Once online, it will produce enough gas to generate 125,000 megawatt-hours of energy a year, enough to power about 17,000 homes.