

Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

SOMERSET REC

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President

Clarence B. Waltermire, District 5

Vice President

Jerry L. Engle, District 4

Secretary/Treasurer

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Floyd T. Lehman, District 1

Russ Hillegas, District 2

P. Timothy Vought, District 6

Jason Huston, District 7

Joshua C. Sechler, District 8

Harvey W. Reckner Jr., District 9

Ruston Ogburn
General Manager

STAFF

Gary Gindlesperger

Manager of Information Technology

Douglas E. Glessner

Manager of Outside Operations

Jonathan Hillegas

Director of Finances

Emily Baer

Director of Marketing and Member Services

Phil Stern

Manager of Metering Services

Jessi Ditzler

Executive Assistant

OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

EMERGENCY OUTAGE NUMBERS

814-445-4106
800-443-4255

Good Board Governance – We’ve Got It!



EMILY BAER

I RECENTLY ATTENDED THE 2023 Strategic Communications Forum, hosted by the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, where one presentation in particular caught my attention. For nearly an hour, we discussed the impact governance has on the operation and reputation of our cooperatives and looked at some of the worst recent examples from around the country. My initial thought was, “How in the world would I communicate such a thing to our members?” Fortunately, this won’t be necessary. Good board governance already exists at Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC).

Good board governance is the secret sauce that allows an organization to function and prosper. It is the authority vested in some members, *elected by other members*, to oversee the management and operations of the co-op. The important word here is “oversee.” The governing board sets the policy and provides accountability, while day-to-day activities are handled by the employees.

Governance is a collaborative effort. It promotes transparency and trust through a relationship, with rules, to enable honest conversation between board and management, achieving accountability, risk management, safety, compliance, and ethics.

Cooperative directors go through a series of education and training to earn certificates, such as Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership Certificate, and many directors are willing to continue learning to help make the decisions that will improve the quality of life for their community. Co-op culture understands the need for an open discussion of a strategic plan and the means to monitor the success and failure of those efforts.

Most of the work directors do is accomplished at a monthly board meeting. However, outside of these meetings, your directors continue to be engaged with the membership in other ways, too. The board participates in a tour of our field operations to keep up to date with changes and improvements in the electric distribution system. It’s a “real world” view at what Somerset REC looks like on the outside. Directors also participate in member engagement events such as our annual meeting, Member Appreciation Day, and membership surveys that provide the board with feedback on member services, expectations, and preferences.

This November, the co-op is thankful for its dedicated board of nine members who have the best interest of the cooperative in mind when making decisions and plans. These board members are happy to talk to you at a Friday night football game or take a phone call from you in the evening at home.

I wish you a happy and healthy Thanksgiving holiday spent with family and friends. 🍂

EMILY BAER

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND MEMBER SERVICES

Farmers Get Creative: Manure Used in Sustainable Dairy Farming

ABBY STOLTZFUS, SUMMER INTERN

FARMING IS MORE SUSTAINABLE THAN ever before, and farmers have come up with creative ways to continue to bring delicious and nutritious food to your table.

Some of these ways include water cycling, crop and soil management, and even turning manure into renewable energy. A local farm in the south-central part of Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative's (REC) service territory does just that. DoVan Farms, owned and operated by the Vangilder family, uses an anaerobic digester to power its 620-cow dairy farm operation.

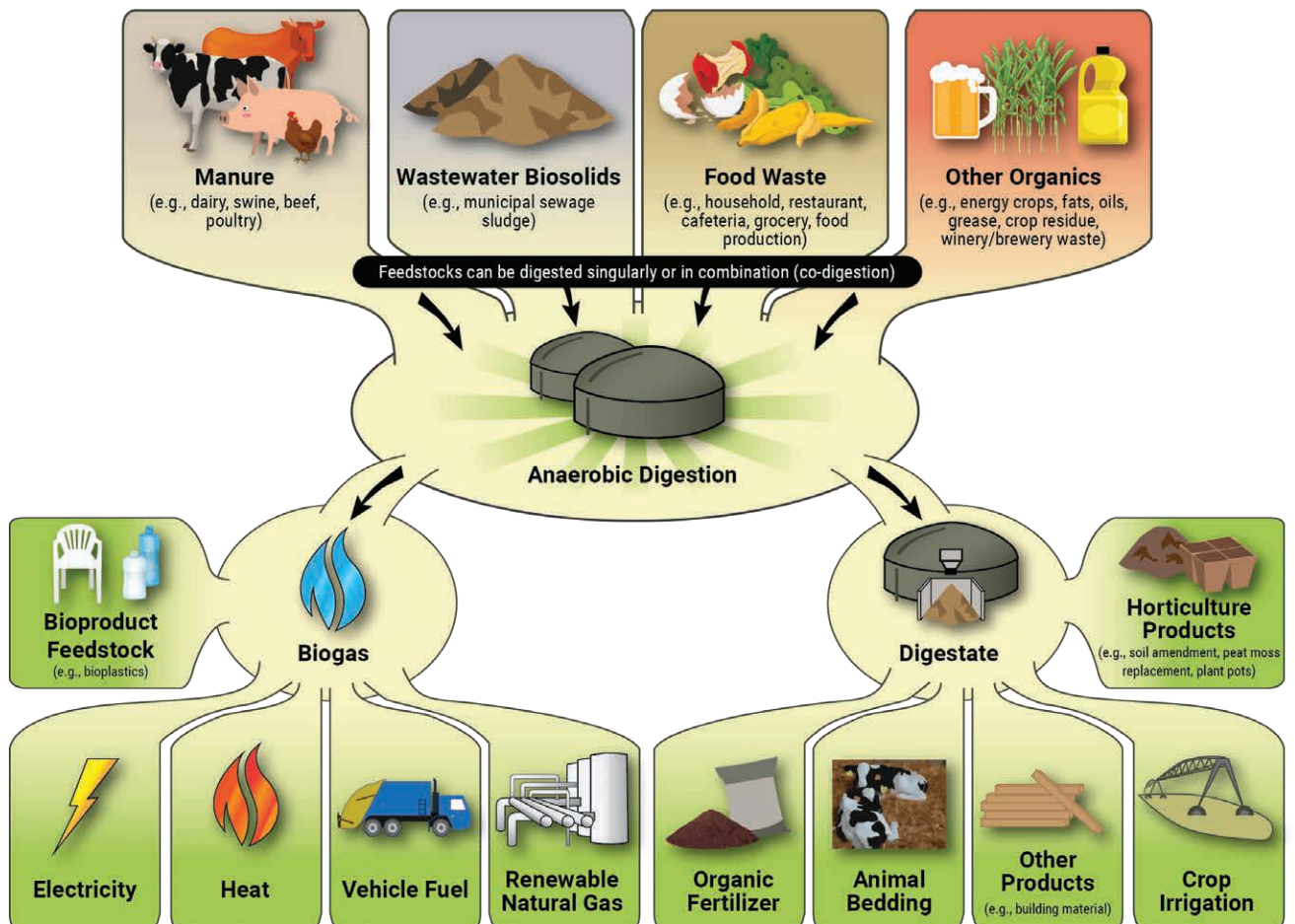
A fourth-generation, family-owned dairy farm in Berlin, Pa., DoVan is primarily managed by twin brothers Justin and Jason Vangilder and their families. Jason oversees the manure digester, which was interconnected to the co-op in 2006, when they had about 400 head of dairy cows.

When the Vangilders began expanding their dairy

operation, they came up with the idea of an anaerobic digester and thoughts of cleaner energy, fertilizer, and bedding for their cows. With the help of grants and after a lot of paperwork, their digester was up and running.

When dairy cattle digest food, their bodies produce methane gas, which is then released in their manure. When methane gas is not handled correctly, it travels directly to the atmosphere and is one of the four greenhouse gases harmful to our environment. However, farmers have found a way to contain this methane gas and put it to good use.

In simple terms, the manure from the animal is transported to a holding unit, where it can be separated into solids, liquids and gas. The methane gas is harnessed to a generator and transferred into energy, powering and heating the farm. On DoVan Farms, a manure holding pit contains about 330,000 gallons of manure and can gen-



ANAEROBIC DIGESTION: DoVan Farms in Berlin, Pa., uses manure in an anaerobic digester to create bio-gas, which can be used like natural gas to provide heat or generate electricity.

erate up to 130 kilowatts of power. That's more electricity and heat than the farm requires, so the farm can sell its excess energy back to Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. — the wholesale energy provider for the 14 electric co-ops in Pennsylvania and New Jersey — which in turn benefits Somerset REC members. The energy can also be used to heat the water at the farm to ensure there's always enough hot water to clean the parlor and the milking system.

In addition to renewable energy, the manure digester uses another machine to separate the liquids and solids in the manure. The liquids can be used as a chemical-free fertilizer and applied to the farm's crops and fields, which helps to minimize the use of commercial fertilizer. Manure is packed with plenty of nitrogen and phosphorus, which is great for the soil.

"The liquid manure helps raise the pH," Jason explains, "so it's better for the soil to grow our crops."

The dried solids are used as bedding for the cattle in the barns. When the solids are separated and heated, they provide clean, soft bedding for the animals. Heating and compressing the solids eliminates the bacteria in the manure, making it the perfect refurbished bedding.

This helps the farm save financially on bedding and fertilizer, and neighbors prefer it, too. Separating the manure components eliminates nearly all the odor from the manure, so no more neighbors saying, "Ew, that stinks," when farmers are spreading manure on the fields.

The cleaner fertilizer and bedding are a bonus, but Jason says the digester is best used to manage their manure. On average, one cow will produce about 80 pounds of manure daily. With 620 cows, that's nearly 25 tons of manure every day. Dairy farmers follow strict rules and regulations to reduce their environmental impact. Farmers devise manure management plans to stay environmentally friendly, and the digester on DoVan Farms is a big part of its plan.

Jason explains an anaerobic digester can prove to be beneficial to any farm, whether it has 100 or 700 cows. With the help of grants and federal funding, farmers can find a spot for a manure digester in their budget and their manure management plan. There are approximately 26 manure digesters in Pennsylvania, with most of them on dairy farms.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in 2022, anaerobic digesters helped reduce greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to more than 10 million metric tons of carbon dioxide. Additionally, in 2022, there were more than 2 million megawatt-hours generated from more than 300 anaerobic digester systems across the U.S.

Moving forward, farmers will continue to find more ways to be environmentally friendly while providing delicious and nutritious dairy products, such as milk, cheese, butter, ice cream, and yogurt.

For more information about anaerobic digesters or if you are considering one for your farm, contact the Penn State Extension office in Somerset at 814-445-8911 or talk to local farmers currently using digesters in their farming operations. 📍



VERSATILE MANURE: Manure is separated and dried to use as fresh, clean bedding for the cows at DoVan Farms. Due to the digester's versatility, all parts of the manure can be used and none are wasted.



WHAT'S THAT SMELL?: Living in rural Pennsylvania, we've all smelled manure a mile away. But did you know that cows can smell something up to 6 miles away? Now, that's impressive.

Safety Committee Promotes Safe Work Culture

SOMERSET RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE (REC) participates in the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s rigorous Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP).

RESAP promotes the highest standards of safety by encouraging cooperatives to build upon and enhance their own safety efforts. RESAP operates on a three-year cycle, includes a formal leadership commitment to safety, formal field observation and documentation, an annual safety improvement plan, and regular self-assessments. Promoting a safe work culture for members and employees is Somerset REC’s priority. Safety focused areas at the co-op include:

- ▶ Accidents, incidents and near misses
- ▶ Equipment and supplies
- ▶ Safety training and meetings for employees
- ▶ Inspections of fire extinguishers, first-aid kits, AEDs, the pole yard and barn, shop and warehouse, parking lots and public access areas, and exit signs
- ▶ Permits and licenses
- ▶ Consumer education
- ▶ Employee wellness 🇺🇸



SAFETY COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Members of the 2023 Safety Committee meet monthly to review Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative’s safety procedures and practices. Seated, from left, are: Tawnya Zorn, Daniele Anderson, Jonathan Hillegas and Phil Stern. Standing, from left, are: Andrew Phillippi, Rus Ogburn, Casey Pyle, Dave Dudak and Roy Bittner. Missing from photo Doug Glessner and Tony Retassie.

ANNUAL BOARD TOUR



TOUR DE CO-OP: Seven Somerset REC directors and three co-op employees spent a day touring parts of the cooperative’s service territory. The day started by visiting Listonburg Solar, a 15-megawatt solar project with an anticipated in-service date of 2024, followed by a tour of Guy Chemical Co. and Pride substation. Guy Chemical staff, including General Manager Bruce Contino and Value Stream Managers Wes Fritz and Stew Trulick, gave directors and staff a thorough tour of the facility. Located on Somerset REC lines, Guy Chemical develops and formulates advanced silicone sealants, greases, and two-part epoxy adhesives. Guy Chemical Co.’s workforce moves more than 1 million components through the plant daily to build customer orders that are shipped to more than 130 countries. The products manufactured at Guy Chemical Co. can be found locally in Walmart, AutoZone, Advance Auto, Home Depot, Lowes, and Dollar General, to name a few. They also assist major companies in tube and cartridge filling, blister packaging, and shipping services. The company employs about 170 people from Somerset County, keeping manufacturing jobs local.

**THE OFFICE WILL BE
CLOSED ON FRIDAY, NOV. 10,
IN OBSERVANCE OF
VETERANS DAY**

We thank you for your service.



**THE OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED
THURSDAY, NOV. 23, FOR THANKSGIVING DAY**

Wishing you a happy and festive holiday with family and friends.

