

# Digester to reduce food waste heralds a greener future



A rendering of the planned anaerobic digester facility under construction in Yaphank. Credit: Jim Neidert / JPN Studios

**By The Editorial Board**

April 24, 2022 4:00 pm



The waste that goes into the anaerobic digester facility under construction in Yaphank is as important as the products that come out.

What goes in: organic materials like food past its prime and the leftover scraps from restaurants, cafeterias, and commercial kitchens.

Beneficial items that come out: compost and the kind of liquid fertilizer in high demand by agricultural businesses. The facility will produce enough energy to run itself. Excess water will be sent to a treatment plant. And, also importantly, the byproduct of biogas will go into the National Grid distribution system, heating people's homes and running their stoves.

In other words, the environment wins on both ends. Trashed food that would have been shipped to often-faraway landfills to emit methane, a greenhouse gas, is instead converted into useful products, not to mention a renewable source of energy.

That is the promise of the Yaphank facility that broke ground last week, a project of American Organic Energy, run by the Vigliotti brothers whose Long Island Compost company has had a long and sometimes controversial history in the area. The digester will occupy part of the grounds of the composting site, which will continue operations.

The project is a long time coming. Around a decade ago, neighbors, civic associations, and Citizens Campaign for the Environment were among those who raised alarms about issues in the vicinity of all this composting, including awful smells. Composting mogul Charles Vigliotti says his outfit made changes in what products it accepted, and that the forthcoming digester setup would help eliminate odors, including by moving pungent grass clippings indoors.

The digester facility will include a building to process the often-odorous material, and a series of tanks where organic material decomposes and gas is captured. Among the highlights of the operation will be machinery that can prepare the incoming waste, and airlocking methods to keep odors inside.

This project has been vetted for years. Now, Citizens Campaign for the Environment is celebrating the digester equipment, which represents technological modernization of the composting process. Vigliotti expects to be accepting material and making biogas by the end of 2023.

That's when the real work will begin, with the facility processing an expected 180,000 tons of food waste per year. Execution will be key to make sure of the environment benefits on both ends and that the facility's neighbors do indeed enjoy the fruits of better machinery and construction.

If all goes according to plan, the new digester should be another important step toward a greener Long Island, along with big developments in offshore wind, advances in battery storage for renewable energy, and — hopefully — more charging stations, electric cars, and improved mass transit. A sustainable future demands no less.