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Research tackles methane use and capture in agriculture

The potential for the capture and use of methane from animal waste in intensive agricultural industries has moved a step closer with the release of new research reports from the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC).

Using Methane in Intensive Livestock Industries is targeted at researchers and industry and provides a summary of existing information and recommendations on future R&D needs to make methane capture and use a reality.

Methane produced by animal waste (manure) in industries such as pork, dairy and beef feedlots is estimated to represent only about three per cent of Australian agricultural greenhouse gas emissions. However capturing methane emissions is considered the quickest and most cost-effective way to reduce emissions from agriculture and provides potential for re-use on farm.

RIRDC's General Manager, New Rural Industries, Dr Roslyn Prinsley, said pursuing methane capture and use could be a win-win.

"Burning methane turns it into carbon dioxide, which in terms of its greenhouse gas emissions is at least 23 times less potent, so capturing it in intensive industries and burning it can bring very large environmental gains.

"The next step is the potential use of methane either on farm – for instance to warm sheds or fuel feed mills – or for selling to other energy users.

"These options can improve environmental outcomes, provide energy savings or secondary income streams for farmers, and could be very significant in the event of development of an Australian emissions trading scheme.

"This report collates all the available information on current processes and provides direction on further research that is needed to develop methane capture technology in Australia," Dr Prinsley said.

The second report – *Assessment of Australian Biogas Flaring Standards* – examines the regulatory requirements of using biogas flares (used to burn methane) and the disparities between states. It is aimed at helping regulators and policy makers to remove some of these impediments and will also be of interest to producers in intensive livestock industries who may be looking to invest in capture and flaring to reduce the greenhouse impact of their methane emissions.

These reports were funded by RIRDC's Methane to Markets in Australian Agriculture program which is jointly funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and National Landcare Program, and four rural R&D Corporations – RIRDC, Australian Pork Limited, Meat and Livestock Australia, and Dairy Australia.

The reports are available at www.rirdc.gov.au.

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