Gas from Grass Could Heat Up British Homes

Source: seeker.com

Published: November 21, 2016

Ecotricity

By Kieran Mulvaney

A green energy company in Britain has announced a plan that it says could enable that country to heat almost every home with gas derived from grass.

Ecotricity, which claims to be the world's first green electricity company, reports that gas from grass "could provide all of the gas needs for 97 percent of Britain's homes, pump £7.5 billion [$9.4 billion] annually into the economy, and create a new industry with up to 150,000 jobs."

The key, according to company founder, Dale Vince, would be to take grass from marginal farmland and break it down in an anaerobic digester; the grass would be turned into biomethane within 45 days and then injected into the national network.

The company has received planning permission to build the first of its proposed Green Gas Mills, which is slated to be operational in 2018, and which Ecotricity says will produce enough energy to power 4,000 homes.

Of course, 4,000 homes, while impressive, is a long way short of 97 percent of all the homes in Britain; Vince asserts that there is sufficient arable land to provide the raw material but that its conversion would require the construction of another 5,000 mills.

"It would be a massive undertaking but it would be permanent. Grass keeps growing, it doesn't run out, unlike gas from fracking," he told The Guardian. "It's massively beneficial [environmentally] because the grassland gets managed and becomes wildlife habitat while the grass is growing, and we crop it at the right time of year."

The proposal has met with some support. "As long as it's not competing with food production, green gas like this project can be really helpful in getting the U.K .onto a cleaner and lower carbon path," said Doug Parr, chief scientist and policy director of Greenpeace UK.

"Agriculture need not simply be part of the problem in tackling climate change, but through innovation it can be part of the solution, and improve wildlife habitats at the same time. "

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