



# The Valley News

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## **Proposed beef/cattle project: Bion responds to council's environmental concerns**

by Carol Thompson

In a 24-page written response, Bion Environmental Technologies, Inc. has answered questions raised by the Oswego County Environmental Management Council in regard to a proposed beef processing and ethanol production facility proposed for somewhere within the county lines.

Bion is proposing a large-scale, integrated, closed-loop beef cattle/renewable energy project in Oswego County that has so far been met with skepticism by some legislators, farmers, and members of the public.

The Environmental Management Council was asked by the legislature's Economic Development and Planning Committee to gather further information so that it could be determined whether to move ahead with the appointment of a task force.

In answer to the question, "How much total land is anticipated to be required for the entire project including feed lots, feed storage, manure processing, slaughtering, food processing, ethanol production, facilities for transportation—ship, rail, truck, etc.?", the company responded that the precise amount of land required for the project will ultimately be determined by an evaluation of available parcels.

Following a lengthy elaboration, it is noted, "Considering all integrated project activities, beef cattle feeding and ethanol, therefore, conservative projections indicate a total land requirement of less than 2,000 acres with the majority used for cropping/buffer."

The council also asked if there will be a limit of scale applied to the project so that in the future it could not grow beyond the currently anticipated size without

further approval from the County of Oswego and other local governments.

Bion responded, “As the project requires various permits from the State of New York (i.e., environmental impact assessments) and local approvals (such as site plan review), the permit process is self-limiting. This is true because SEQR (State Environmental Quality Review) is a predicate to any such permits or approvals and SEQR requires identification of specific sites along with the scope and size of project components to be implemented at each site. Approvals will of necessity be for the scope and size identified in the permit application documents. Going beyond the identified and approved scope and size would necessarily trigger a new approval process.”

In answer to the question of what guarantees Bion is prepared to make, should there ever be a need to close or “walk away from” the facility, to ensure closure will eliminate future negative environmental impacts, Bion said that it will develop an operational plan for public review that will outline the specific steps and time frames for de-commissioning project facilities in the event that any would be closed.

The council asked about the anticipated impact on Oswego County taxpayers of this project. “For example, will a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreement be requested? Will a reduction in assessed property taxes for 20 or more years be expected?”

The response was, “Bion intends to work with the county planners as well as representatives of state and federal programs to develop project plans that will ensure an environmentally acceptable and economically viable project providing long-term benefits to the community. It is simply not possible to address intentions for or status of individual programs in isolation of that coordinated, public process.”

Under a proposal presented by Bion, there would be more than 70,000 head of cattle housed somewhere in the county. There would be an estimated 600 jobs created and it would be a “closed-loop” operation, meaning the cattle’s manure would be used for ethanol, a Bion official explained at a recent meeting.

Should a task force be formed, Bion would most likely be required to place a performance bond with the county so that any studies needed would be paid for by the company and not the taxpayers, legislators said.

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