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State to Get Another Biodiesel Plant

By John Henry - 8/30/2006 8:36:32 AM

Arkansas SoyEnergy Group LLC of DeWitt has announced plans for a new facility that will produce biodiesel fuel made entirely from soybean oil.

Founders Jeff, Troy and Jon Hornbeck, all of DeWitt, said they hope to start construction on the new plant this month and expect to produce the first 100 percent soy-based fuel by 2007.

When initial construction is complete, Arkansas SoyEnergy will produce 3 million gallons of soy-based biodiesel. Future expansion could more than double the initial capacity.

Arkansas farmers produce about 124 million bushels of soybeans, and a bushel will yield about 1.3 gallons of B100. The new plant is designed to allow for expansion up to 6.5 million gallons of biodiesel in the future.

The plant, which they believe is the first of its kind in the state, will crush on-site soybeans grown within a 50-mile radius of DeWitt, creating a new market for area farmers as well as providing "homegrown energy" that can be used in farm machinery and vehicles.

Arkansas SoyEnergy Group will process up to 110,000 tons of soybeans annually, and 85 percent of that volume will leave the plant as soybean meal for use in animal feeds.

Other biodiesel plants in the state use soybean or cottonseed oil, animal fats, or used cooking oils to make biodiesel that is then blended with regular diesel.

"The greatest thing about this new plant is that it will help the farmers in this community," said Troy Hornbeck of DeWitt, a principal in Arkansas SoyEnergy Group. "Farmers need new markets for their crops, and they are battling higher energy costs. Our goal is to create new markets and produce cost-effective fuel for farmers, right here in Arkansas County."

Pure, unblended biodiesel is called B100, and blended fuels are labeled to show their biofuel content. For example, B20 is a blend of 20 percent biodiesel and 80 percent petroleum diesel.

"We will be able to sell partially processed oil to other refiners, or we could splash-blend the B100 on our site for delivery to the farm, or we could sell the B100 fuel," Hornbeck said.

The Hornbecks also own and manage a family farm and the Hornbeck Seed Co., one of the Midsouth's top dealers of proprietary soybean products.

Arkansas already has two producers of biodiesel: Patriot BioFuels of Stuttgart, which announced last month that it was expanding to meet demand, and what was Eastman Chemical Corp. (now part of the Viceroy Acquisition Corp.) at Batesville.

At least three other plants are possibilities, or at least are in the discussion stages.

Farmers, businessmen and politicians all see a solid future for biodiesel in the state because the state has an abundant soybean crop, refineries are relatively inexpensive to construct and operate, and currently there's a big demand for biodiesel.

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