

# DeWitt Era-Enterprise

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## Local soy diesel plant makes its debut

Arkansas SoyEnergy has open house

By Christina Verderosa

Calling it the “culmination of a two-year dream,” Troy Hornbeck welcomed a crowd of over 200 people to the grand opening of the Arkansas Soy Energy Group, LLC plant south of DeWitt Tuesday. The plant, which crushes soybeans for oil and other products and will eventually add a biodiesel refinery, is the first of its kind in Arkansas.

U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln, U.S. Rep. Marion Berry and state Rep. Benny Petrus headed the guest list, along with a host of local farmers, officials, business partners and supporters. All the speakers praised the Hornbeck brothers, Jon, Jeff and Troy, for taking the chance on brand-new technology.

“A lot of people talk about doing something,” Petrus said. “[The Hornbecks] did something.”

The plant has been operational since November 2007, but had not reached full production due to some mechanical difficulties involved in working out a brand-new process.

But general manager Terry McCullars said the crusher has been fully operational since about the first of January. The next step is to complete the refinery, which will allow Arkansas Soy Energy Group to take its soybean oil and refine it into B-100 fuel.

Lincoln called the plant “an incredible investment.

“This is what family businesses produce,” she said. “It’s here for all the right reasons”: to create jobs and to protect the environment. Lincoln said that when she first ran for Congress, her mother told her that if she did nothing else, she should do something to help children stay in eastern Arkansas. “This is what the Hornbecks have done.”

Lincoln said that coming to DeWitt to see this plant gives her more determination to go back to Washington, DC, “and fight to make those dreams a reality.”

Berry, who is from Gillett, said, “it’s really nice to celebrate something like this in your own backyard.”

Petrus spoke about what needs to be done to further promote biofuels in the region and the state. "We've got to believe in this product and push this product."

Two steps the state can take are to introduce mandates for biodiesel and to keep up the level of funding for the alternate fuel program fund. A number of states have already introduced mandates for using biofuels in their vehicles.

The Arkansas Legislature approved \$20 million in funding for alternative fuels in the 2007 session, but, "only \$9 million of that is ongoing," Petrus explained.

McCullars said afterward, "Things are really picking up. Sales have been going like gangbusters." The biggest challenge coming up may be to keep up the supply of soybeans.

With soybeans selling for \$13.70 per bushel, "the price of petroleum diesel has declined." McCullars also said mandates for government agencies would help to build up the infrastructure needed to promote the retail sales of biofuels.

The plant is designed to buy soybeans locally and eventually sell the biofuel back to local farmers. Troy Hornbeck described it as "home-grown energy," a phrase that appears on the company's logo. "That's not just a catchphrase for us," he said. "That's our passion."