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NEWS

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Experts: Bioenergy leading to more efficient and environmentally friendly energy future

Biodiesel production can help feed the world's poor

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Biodiesel is helping to drive new technology, crop diversity and more efficient use of our resources. Common solutions exist to increase food and energy security simultaneously, while providing economic and environmental benefits to society. Those are the conclusions of two land use experts who spoke on a National Biodiesel Board panel today.

"We need to start thinking of agriculture as multi-functional," said Dr. Stephen Kaffka of the University of California - Davis Department of Plant Sciences. Kaffka is director of the California Biomass Collaborative, which works to enhance the sustainable management and development of biomass for renewable energy.

"Biofuel feedstocks or residue use should be considered from a cropping system's perspective and not just as a separate enterprise," he said. "Bioenergy is just one service that agricultural systems can provide us. Crop use for fuels need not compete with crops used for food. In sound agricultural systems, these uses can be complimentary."

Kaffka also pointed out that the efficiency of American agriculture shouldn't be underestimated when looking at issues of food and fuel.

"We've seen a 400-fold increase in soybean yields during the last century," he said. "We've accomplished this with lower inputs of water and fertilizer per bushel, even as cropland has declined. Biodiesel is helping to drive the new technologies that make that progress a reality."

"We have a terrific opportunity for international development," concluded Kaffka.

Worldwide, bioenergy done correctly can be part of the solution to address food insecurity and poverty, according to Keith Kline of the Center for Bioenergy Sustainability at Oak Ridge National Laboratory who also presented on the NBB panel. Kline's career spans 25 years of work on environment, energy and development programs in Latin America and Africa as well as the United States.

"Reducing price volatility benefits both producers and consumers," Kline said. "Biofuels can help diversify and expand production and markets, thereby reducing commodity price volatility while creating opportunities for value-added processing and employment. When biofuels increase incomes and build resilience for rural families, they contribute to food security. And when biofuels reduce monetary transfers for fossil fuel imports

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and convert part of those costs into an investment in local production, they can improve food and energy security while reducing harmful emissions," Kline said.

"Given that millions of acres of land suitable for agriculture are previously cleared and underutilized, and millions more burn each year, in part due to lack of market opportunities, bioenergy and food production can expand while conserving forests," Kline said.

Kline noted the significant reduction in the world deforestation rate in recent years as biofuel production increased, and he highlighted several common causes of deforestation and food insecurity that bioenergy policies can and should address. These include improving soil management, increasing efficiency throughout the supply chain, creating incentives that can be measured, and monitoring to ensure policies are having the desired effects.

Don Scott, National Biodiesel Board director of sustainability, moderated the panel and on-line discussion ("Vantage Point: Views on Food, Fuel and Land Use").

"U.S. biodiesel is produced from diverse natural oils, including vegetable oil, animal fats and recycled cooking oil," Scott said. "Biodiesel has multiple positive impacts on the food supply. For instance, biodiesel uses only the oil portion of the soybean, not the protein. By increasing yield without increasing crop acres, we are growing more fuel and food from the same land."

In 2010, the U.S. biodiesel industry produced 160 million gallons of biodiesel from soybean oil, which co-produced enough soybean meal for 48 billion rations of protein like those used in global hunger programs.

The on-line event drew more than 100 participants, including government regulators, military personnel, scientists and students. The event was promoted among college students as part of the Next Generation Scientists for Biodiesel effort.

Biodiesel is an advanced biofuel made from readily available, renewable resources. It is drop-in diesel fuel replacement that reduces greenhouse gas by 80 percent.

You can hear a podcast of the event at www.biodiesel.org/files/20110524_nbb_webinar.mp3
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For more on biodiesel, please visit the National Biodiesel Board website at www.biodiesel.org.