

Mo. Delta AgBioWorks Supports New Product Uses

BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER

MidAmerica Farmer Grower

SIKESTON, MO

Missouri Delta AgBioWorks, a grant funded, non-profit program to promote biomass as an agricultural economic development commodity, was begun recently by the Sikeston Area Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Memphis BioWorks in Tennessee, Missouri Department of Agriculture, Delta Regional Authority, Pemiscot Port Authority and Missouri Technology Corporation.

Program Director Chris Evans explained the goal of the program is to build and promote a farmer/producer network that will consist of local farmers throughout the Southeast Missouri region including the counties of Scott, Stoddard, Mississippi, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Dunklin and Butler. These farmers will be the “go-to” producers for supplying feedstock crops that are needed for research or to boost acreage in the area which will serve as the driving force for future feedstock supplies.

“The program has a pretty broad scope but is designed to bring in any agricultural product that can be used in different ways to promote both agriculture and support a bio-base industry,” he said.

Based on research published in the 2009 Batelle Study, the Mississippi Delta Region has the opportunity to grow and develop an economy based around the biomass production and processing industry. This area can become a major supplier of feedstock crops for oil, starch, sugar, and cellulose (residue). Examples include soybeans, canola, corn, sweet sorghum, and giant miscanthus to name a few.

“It all goes back to the biofuel industry,” Evans further explained. “Of course, canola is used in biodiesel and as cooking oil, giant miscanthus

can be used as feedstock for fuel, but can also be used as poultry bedding; and there’s a trial at Murray State University in Kentucky researching its use as premium horse stall bedding.”

Giant miscanthus as well as biomass from crop residue can also be pelletized and burned as a coal supplement at power plants.

Recently, Missouri Delta AgBioWorks along with University of Missouri Extension held a Canola tour on the Patrick Hulshof farm in northern Scott County near Morley, Mo. Hulshof’s 100-plus acres of winter canola was nearing harvest, and he, along with Heartland Potato manager Bruce Ray, provided insight on growing the crop from a producer’s standpoint.

Dr. Rob Myer from University of Missouri Extension in Columbia presented more in-depth information regarding planting and harvesting dates, seed varieties, chemical applications, and information about crop insurance and buyer information.

Canola stands to be a viable alternative to winter wheat in the Bootheel with potential yields at or above average. Most of the

canola oil used in the United States is imported from Canada and used as cooking oil. Canola also serves as a reliable feedstock for the production of biodiesel.

Many of the 25 individuals in attendance showed interest in planting canola for the upcoming fall season. Plans are currently underway to hold a follow-up meeting in July for an extended look at growing Canola in Southeast Missouri.

The hope is that new uses for these products will help the rural economy while also providing safe and effective ways to enhance efficiency in the work place. Δ

BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER: Senior Staff Writer, MidAmerica Farmer Grower

