

Gasohol bandwagon keeps on rolling

By DIETER KRIEG

WASHINGTON, D.C. — There is a movement underway in the nation's capital which would change the federal farm program from one which pays to let land set idle, to one which encourages more planting. The idea behind the scheme is to use a portion of this country's farmland for the production of energy. Specifically, crops such as corn, barley, wheat, might be used for the production of alcohol and it in turn would be mixed with unleaded gasoline to make gasohol. Gasohol is said to be a cleaner-burning and more powerful fuel than ordinary gasoline. Aside from that, it will help to stretch the world's energy reserves, advocates say.

Much of the positive force that's being generated on behalf of gasohol is coming from an Iowa Congressman, Berkley Bedell, a member of the House Agriculture Committee. His bill, H.R. 3905, would accomplish three things:

It would eliminate the feed grain set-aside and replace it with a flat \$2.75 per bushel target price for corn.

Secondly, it would require that farmers agree to strict conservation practices and to sell the government 10 per cent of their crop at market price in order to get deficiency payments. Such grain could only be used for gasohol production.

Third, it would guarantee loans to gasohol producers for plant construction and sell them the surplus grain at a cut rate, perhaps half the target price. According to a recent study, says Bedell, gasohol could be sold at near competitive prices at the pump at a profit if the gasohol is made from corn costing \$1.25 per bushel.

Bedell introduced his original proposal (H.R. 2153) to the House on Feb. 15. H.R. 3905 is essentially the same bill with minor modifications. Bedell says the new bill "simply makes a few refinements and improvements." H.R. 3905, introduced to Congress on May 3, had 32 co-sponsors as of May 31.

Representing a strong agricultural district in northwest Iowa, Bedell believes his proposals would help farmers and all of society. He points out that fuels are in short supply and farmers in the Midwest are particularly worried about the availability of Diesel fuel.

The Iowan defends his bill with the following words.

"Instead of the federal government being forced to maintain huge stores of various commodities that in many cases are in danger of spoiling and in all cases constitute substantial storage costs, it can release these stocks in an orderly fashion to plants as they come on line to be transformed into a very valuable product - alcohol for use as fuel."

David Hallberg, an assistant to Congressman Bedell, and well-versed on gasohol and agricultural matters, says the government is currently spending \$1.6 billion per year for farm set-aside programs. He points out that the money is

spent without anything productive resulting from it. "With gasohol it would be productive," he exclaimed.

Support for the gasohol program is coming from all over the nation, although it's more concentrated in the Corn Belt. Farm organizations are not rapid with their support, said Hallberg, but they are cautiously supportive. A lot of questions are being asked, he admitted.

Bedell, in his testimony before Congress on May 15, claimed "private industry is just waiting in the wings to become involved in the alcohol fuels business. But the first requisite is an explicit demonstration by the government that it is willing to provide the industry with some semblance of support and security for a reasonable period of time."

Bedell insists his proposal is not just another way of supporting grain prices.

Questioned on whether or not H.R. 3905 would increase the federal government's involvement in the agricultural sector, Bedell answered negatively.

"On the contrary the proposal would set the stage for almost total government disengagement from the current price support system," he explained.

Bedell calculates that his program would, on paper at least, allow for the production of 1.875 billion gallons of ethyl alcohol (derived from 750 million bushels of corn at a

rate of 2.5 gallons per bushel). For comparisons, he says one barrel of imported crude oil contains 42 gallons, but only 20 gallons of gasoline can be refined out of each barrel of crude. "Therefore it can be argued that 1.875 billion gallons of ethanol could displace over \$1.3 billion of crude (with crude valued at \$14.50 per barrel.)"

Bedell's legislation goes beyond the singular use of corn as a source for the alcohol needed to make gasohol.

A mechanism is provided to use any agricultural commodity over which the U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary has control. Sugar and wheat stocks, for example, could be used, Bedell assured.

On the question of the possible conflict between crops for food and feed, and crops for fuel, Bedell explained he sees no conflict (See story on page 126).

Bedell's bill has some opposition, but overall, his camp is optimistic. At the same congressional hearing at which Bedell testified on May 15, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Jim Williams promised that USDA will take action to help make land and feedstocks available to support fuel alcohol production. "But," he said, "it is important to make sure in considering ways to develop gasohol that we do not make changes in agricultural policy that might prove counterproductive to farm producers or other segments of the economy."

New inheritance law in effect

UNIVERSITY PARK — A spouse's rights to certain property at the death of a husband or wife has been changed under Act 23 of 1978, says Greta C. Vairo, Extension home economist with the Penn State Extension Service. The new law applies only if there is a partial will or no will, and it does not affect jointly owned property which passes to the surviving spouse. Amendments state: "A surviving spouse receives the first \$20,000 plus half of the balance of the estate. *Children or parents of the deceased person if there are no children receive the other half.

*The entire estate goes to the surviving spouse if there are no children or parents.

*If the decedent had children from a previous marriage, they are allowed to share in the estate with children of a later marriage. This provision applies when there is no will.

EMT grain case not settled

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The Maryland Attorney General's office has decided that an alleged fraud case involving a grain buying firm in Baltimore and farmers in several states, including Pennsylvania, does not fall within the jurisdiction of Maryland's

Consumer Protection Act. The reason is that the farmers involved were sellers, not buyers. The grain buying firm, EMT, had solicited shipments of grain from farmers and allegedly failed to pay for all the grain that was bought.

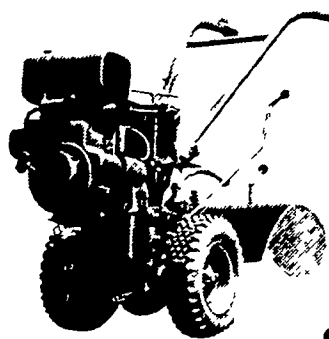
estate if the person died intestate (without a will).

Under the old inheritance laws in Pennsylvania, decedent's children from a previous marriage were not allowed to share in the estate unless a will provided for them.

The Maryland Attorney General advises that the farmers involved may take action through civil lawsuits or by contacting the Maryland State Attorney's offices. Legal action might then be taken to determine whether or not criminal fraud was involved in the EMT case.

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