

Corn Grower Research Efforts Pay Off With PLA Breakthrough

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — The National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) welcomed Cargill Dow Polymers' announcement Jan. 11 about its plans for the first commercial-scale plant to produce polylactic acid (PLA), a plastic from corn.

Cargill Dow's action culminates research and market development on PLA and opens the door to a market that could eventually consume 500 million bushels of corn per year.

Groundbreaking will occur this spring at Blair, Neb., site of a Cargill wet milling plant. The PLA plant will be on line by late 2001. The plant will use 40,000 bushels of corn per day for an annual use of 14 million bushels.

The plant will turn corn into polymers, small chips or pellets of plastic-like material that manufacturers will then process into fabrics for clothing as well as plastics for cups, food containers, packaging, and

home and office furnishings such as carpets.

Cargill Dow emphasized that this is the first time a renewable resource, corn, "stands alone on price and performance."

"Our grower leaders are thrilled to see our efforts yield commercialization," said Floyd Schultz, chairman of NCGA's Customer and Business Development Action Team, and a farmer from Plainfield, Ill. "The combination of Cargill's expertise in corn processing

and Dow's position as a world leader in polymer production and marketing should yield important new products for consumers and an important new market for our most important crop."

PLA applications research has been a priority for several years for corn growers at the state and national levels. The plastics industry is huge, and PLA has great characteristics

for new products. Fabrics made from PLA have the feel of silk and durability of polyester. Other PLA products may include plastic wrap and plastic bottles.

The developments of PLA and related plastics could use 500 million bushels of corn per year, nearly the level of ethanol, which uses 500 million bushels annually and adds about 25 cents per bushel to the price of corn.



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