

Federal Government Urges Fleets To Use Biodiesel

WASHINGTON, D.C.—In an effort to jump-start use of alternative diesel fuel, the USDA recently encouraged fleet managers in the national capitol area to use cleaner-burning biodiesel in their vehicles.

Leading by example, the USDA told fleet managers that it reported its own use of biodiesel to obtain credits toward alternative fuel vehicle purchase requirements, taking advantage of recent changes in the Energy Policy Act (EPAct).

The USDA's Agriculture Research Service (ARS), located in Beltsville, Md., just outside Washington, D.C. has been using the alternative fuel in 68 of its vehicles since August, including a dump truck, bus, combine, several tractors, and other vehicles. Based on its positive experience with biodiesel, ARS hosted a seminar in January with area fleet managers to review the environmental and economic benefits of biodiesel and to generate greater interest in the alternative fuel.

Biodiesel is a nontoxic, clean-burning fuel made from a variety of sources—primarily soybean oil. It is biodegradable and essentially free of sulfur and aromatics. Biodiesel reduces virtually all regulated emissions

and has a pleasant odor (commonly compared to popcorn or french fries) when burned in diesel engines.

"This marks the first time a government agency has organized such an event on its own accord," said Joe Jobe, executive director of the National Biodiesel Board. "It's a demonstration of the incredible interest we are finding in biodiesel from fleets around the country." There were more than 70 participants present at the seminar.

Federal officials emphasized the considerable economic benefits of using biodiesel, in particular when used to obtain credit toward alternative fuel vehicle purchase requirements under EPAct. "Biodiesel is the least expensive fuel that will comply with EPAct," said Pam Serino, a chemist with the Defense Energy Support Center (DESC), who also was present at the seminar. DESC, which operates under the Department of Defense, recently issued policy guidelines for biodiesel, urging agencies within the Department, including the armed forces, to use biodiesel to meet their EPAct requirements.

A 1998 amendment to EPAct allows covered fleets to receive one credit for every 450 gallons

of biodiesel purchased and used at levels of 20 percent or higher in fleet vehicles over 8,500 pounds gross vehicle weight. These credits can satisfy up to 50 percent of a fleet's alternative fuel vehicle purchase requirements.

Serino estimated the cost of biodiesel to be in the range of \$1.50 to \$2.50 per gallon, depending on quantity. The most common use of biodiesel is in a 20 percent biodiesel/80 percent conventional diesel blend, known as B20. The incremental increase in fuel costs for B20 is more than offset by the reduced expenditures in other areas because B20 is used in existing diesel engines with existing fueling infrastructure. B20 also delivers similar power, fuel econ-

omy and performance as petroleum diesel.

According to the National Biodiesel Board's Joe Jobe, "Biodiesel's biggest benefit to fleet managers is its ability to provide an immediate and seamless way to convert an entire diesel fleet to a clean-burning alternative fuel."

ARS Deputy Area Director John Van de Vaarst stressed that all of his vehicles are running on the regular maintenance schedule and have experienced no operational difficulties. He also reported that his employees experienced significantly less eye irritation while using vehicles running on B20 compared to vehicles burning conventional diesel fuel.

Another benefit of biodiesel is

the pleasant smell. One employee literally put his nose right up to the tailpipe of a diesel bus that was running on B20 and took a big whiff of exhaust. "He could not detect a trace of diesel smell from the tailpipe," said ARS Deputy Area Director John Van de Vaarst, "He was amazed."

Biodiesel significantly reduces emissions that contribute to global warming and health risks. B20 reduces emissions of carbon dioxide by 16 percent, carbon monoxide by 20 percent, and particulate matter by 22 percent or more.

For more information on the ARS program and biodiesel, contact Gina DeLuca at (202) 737-8400, National Biodiesel Board at (573) 635-3893, or www.biodiesel.org.

Holds Internet Q&A

WASHINGTON (AP) — Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman used a question-and-answer session on the Internet to press his case that Congress needs to make "fundamental changes" in the 1996 Freedom to Farm law.

"My highest priority is to improve the conditions for small and medium farms in this country," Glickman replied Tuesday to a questioner from Ashland, Kan., who told Glickman that farmers "need help fast."

The hour-long Q&A, which was sponsored and moderated by McClatchy Newspapers, was a first for Glickman. McClatchy editors screened questions that were posted by the public to an Internet site and passed 11 of them to Glickman for him to

answer.

The majority dealt with the farm economy and the struggles of family farms. On Monday, Glickman announced that President Clinton's 2001 budget would include proposals to provide additional income assistance to farmers during periods when commodity prices are low.

Grain prices collapsed in 1998 and economists expect little improvement in 2000. The problems in the nation's farm economy "must be addressed through fundamental changes in the farm bill, expanded access to foreign markets for our products, better crop insurance, and ensuring an adequate supply of fairly priced farm credit," Glickman told the Kansas questioner.

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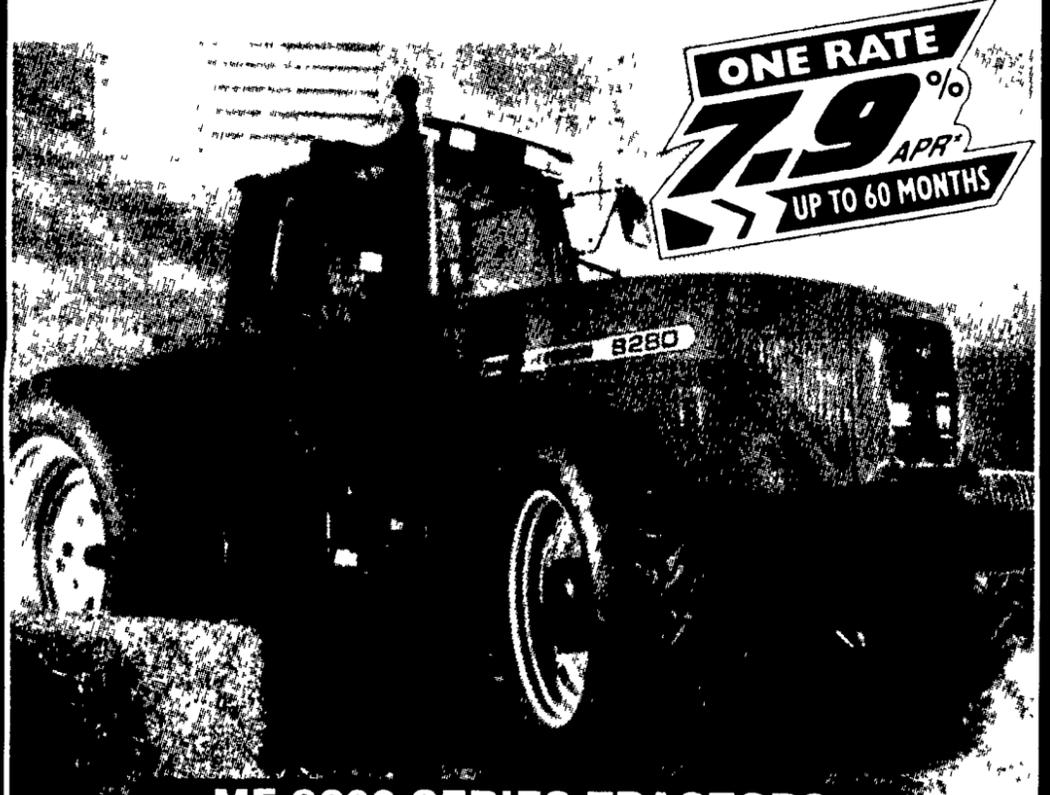
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