

# Local Corn, Soybean Fuel Studies Under Way

## York County Hires Ag Development Specialist

DAVE LEFEVER

Lancaster Farming Staff

YORK (York Co.) — Crop growers and economic development leaders continue to investigate the possibility of building biofuel production facilities in the area.

Turning local crops into fuel could boost profits for farmers, in addition to providing cleaner burning, renewable substitutes for fossil fuels, supporters of the initiative say.

Two new studies will assess the feasibility of producing ethanol from corn and biodiesel from soybeans in a nine-county area of southeast Pennsylvania.

"Both studies are moving ahead," said Scott Welsh, recently hired York County agriculture economic development

specialist.

BBI International, an independent consulting firm based in Colorado, began work on the first phase of an ethanol feasibility study in early December, Welsh said.

The \$30,000 study is funded in part by private utility companies and by the Keystone Development Center, a USDA-backed nonprofit agency to assist farmer cooperatives.

One of the issues the study will address is the best location for a prospective ethanol plant within an area including Berks, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin, Lebanon, Lancaster, and York counties.

Along with the possible addition of Adams and Franklin counties, that area encompasses

a Regional Economic Development District Initiative (REDDI) aimed at boosting the region's economy, according to David Carver, president of the York County Economic Development Corporation (YCEDC).

Carver said that several northern Maryland counties could also benefit from a local biofuel facility.

Carver and the YCEDC first threw their support behind the ethanol project when York County's Agricultural Economic Development Alliance suggested the idea at a meeting last January.

According to Carver, considering a biodiesel plant to produce fuel from soybeans is compatible with the ethanol initiative, even though the two



York County ag and economic development leaders are exploring biofuel production possibilities for the area. Seated, from left, David Carver, president of the Economic Development Corporation, and Scott Welsh, agriculture economic development specialist. Standing, from left, Ag Alliance spokesmen Tony Dobrosky, Dan Wolf, and Bill Myers.

fuels are produced by fundamentally different methods: oil extraction vs. fermentation, respectively.

Both facilities would require a similar infrastructure of land, roads, and electrical power to support them, Carver said.

A \$15,000 study to look at the possibility of building a biodiesel plant in the area was also launched in early December.

Funded by the Pennsylvania soybean checkoff program and conducted by A.U.S. Consultants of Morristown, N.J., the study is concerned with the "general economic feasibility" of a biodiesel plant in the area, Welsh said.

Welsh was hired by the YCEDC in November to facilitate agricultural economic development initiatives in the county.

A Lebanon County native, Welsh received a bachelor of ag sciences degree from Penn State and was

employed by Brubaker Agronomic Consulting Service, Brownstown, for six years before coming to the YCEDC.

Welsh said his job will present opportunities to work on a variety of projects to bolster local agriculture.

"I'll be going out and talking to farmers and agribusinesses (to learn) what is threatening their livelihood," he said.

Besides working on biofuel possibilities, Welsh also plans to focus on direct-marketing and other cooperative incentives for farmers.

The York Ag Alliance consists of a group of farmers, ag agencies, and agribusinesses working with the YCEDC to enhance the local ag economy and "preserve the farmer," according to spokesman Tony Dobrosky.

Two steering committees formed out of the Alliance this year are guiding the ethanol and biodiesel initiatives.

Dan Wolf, a Stewartstown-area corn grower, heads the six-member ethanol committee.

According to Wolf, the larger scope of the ethanol project would involve forming a corn producer's cooperative with members pledging a portion of each year's crop to ethanol production.

YCEDC President Carver said that the "high-technology cooperative" would be supervised by farmers, with some investments coming from other sources.

A reasonable goal for such a cooperative would be to provide dividends to corn producers of \$.30 per bushel above the going market rate, Wolf said.

Bill Myers, a Pioneer Seeds sales representative from Hanover, heads the soybean biodiesel steering committee. (Turn to Page A44)

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- 1:45 'Breeding better grasses' - D. Johnston, Ireland
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