

FARM NEWS

25x'25 goal spreads to D.C.

By Randy Mudgett, Managing editor

FORT DODGE — A bipartisan initiative in Washington could have ongoing effects for Iowa farmers in the years to come once a joint resolution is declared in Congress concerning renewable fuels.

“When the railroad came to Iowa it changed the state forever. Now, renewable fuels promises to take Iowa to the next level,” said Bill Horan, a Rockwell City-area farmer and proponent of renewable energy.

Horan, a board member of a nationwide effort known as the 25x'25 initiative, said lawmakers in Washington are ever closer to releasing a joint resolution that will set the country on course to achieving a 25 percent renewable energy goal by the year 2025 (25x'25).

“The momentum is building and we now have 6 percent renewable power in the country,” Horan said. “We have a long way to go, but we have 19 years to do it and this study that we be revealed shortly will show that our country can achieve this goal.”

One of the many problems facing the renewable fuels industry is sources of energy. The primary sources are now water, wind, solar and feedstocks that include corn and soybeans among other potential sources such as switchgrass. The processes to produce the least affordable renewable fuel that comes primarily from the agriculture sector is not yet come to the forefront however, Horan said cellulosic ethanol technology promises to be online within six or seven years.

“We expect to see a breakthrough in cellulosic ethanol technology in the next six years and that could create a demand for about 100 million acres of energy crops in the U.S.,” Horan said. “Once cellulosic ethanol arrives this will be a legitimate third crop for Iowa creating numerous jobs that help revitalize main street.”

Locally, construction on a wet mill near Fort Dodge that will further process corn will create more demand for corn in north central Iowa. Horan said once VeraSun doubles the size of their current ethanol plant and Tate & Lyle completes construction on its wet mill facility, the two plants will require 850 semi-loads of corn per day.

Coupled with the possibility of an additional 50 ethanol plants slated to be constructed across the country, the demand for fuel testing will be greater as

batches of ethanol and biodiesel must meet government standards before they can travel to market. Testing labs in Kansas City and Houston, Texas have been flooded with requests for ASTM standard tests forcing ethanol and biodiesel plants to incur more cost while test results are delivered.

Jim Kirsten, a spokesman for Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge, said the college is working on receiving funding from the state and federal government to aid the college in building a fuel testing laboratory in Fort Dodge.

“We need about \$1.25 million for the equipment, and we have strong support from local legislators to make this a reality,” Kirsten said.

Today, it takes approximately three to four weeks for fuel tests to be returned to ethanol and biodiesel facilities. Kirsten said the tests cost around \$1,500 per test and even more money to the company who is producing the fuel as they cannot ship the product until the test results are returned.

“We hope to knock the turnaround time on these tests way down, perhaps to a 24-hour period,” Kirsten said.

Iowa Central is now offering a two-year biofuels degree, one that teaches a variety of biofuels applications to students who hope to enter the renewable energy sector., and a fuels testing laboratory would also become an excellent teaching resource for the college.

“This could be the premier school in the country for lab technicians if the money is acquired to build the fuel testing lab,” Horan said.

Currently, about 400 companies, 22 governors and a number of state legislatures have signed onto the idea that the U.S. needs to set the sights of the country on achieving the 25x'25 goal, said Horan Monday. “We are encouraged with the possibilities,” he said.

Iowa Sen. Charles Grassley said Tuesday the 25x'25 goal is achievable. “The backbone of the plan is more conservation of the power we now make,” Grassley said. “We also need to get more of our energy from waste like garbage and other things we throw away. I keep hearing a lot from people that this is a food versus fuel debate and I would agree we would have major problems with animal agriculture if we rely to heavily on corn or soybeans to meet the renewable energy goal. That is why we have to look harder at researching other renewable energy.”