

Conference encourages energy conservation/production on the farm, in the factory
Farmers and food processors give energy a close look

January 14, 2004. . . Pacific Northwest farmers and food processors can literally muster up the energy to help their own bottom line as well as address conservation issues. That's one of the expected take home messages from an ambitious conference scheduled for next week in Portland. The Harvesting Clean Energy Conference is being held in conjunction with the 90th Annual Convention of the Northwest Food Processors Association for good reason. Agricultural producers and processors can both benefit from discussion of clean energy production and use.

"The broad intent of the conference is to help provide farmers and food processors some ideas and opportunities to gain extra value through energy efficiency and perhaps energy production," says Brent Searle, special assistant to the director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture. ODA is among the many agencies and organizations sponsoring the energy conference.

Whether it is through wind, water, the sun, or even manure, many agricultural producers and food processors around the country and the Pacific Northwest are looking at energy production as another crop or asset that can improve an operation's profit statement. Some are using that generation to defray operational costs. Some are even trying to sell it to others.

"I think every operation is going to have to look at what may fit their needs and evaluate the economics associated with energy production," says Searle. "There will be many speakers at the conference, including farmers themselves, who are involved in energy projects that can talk about what works and what doesn't. We hope people can come and listen, then evaluate the opportunities that might exist for their operation."

While renewable energy technology is as old as the windmill and water wheel, the conference will feature real projects— some employing cutting-edge technology. The fact that Oregon Governor Kulongoski and Washington Governor Locke will both speak at the joint energy-food processors conference shows the support both states have for both agriculture and energy interests, especially now.

"There is a lot more interest in renewable energy and a growing demand for it," says Searle. "There are concerns with the impacts of petroleum-based fuels on the environment. Some great opportunities exist for projects involving oil seed-based crops like industrial canola and mustard to produce bio-diesel fuel. Technology is improving equipment and lowering the cost of energy generation. Many of these things are

---more---

coalescing and driving some options that haven't been there to this extent in the past.”

Large amounts of ethanol and bio-diesel are produced in the Midwest, some of which is distributed to the Pacific Northwest. But Oregon producers have the capacity to grow thousands of acres of oil-seed crops, and an evaluation is underway on building an oil-seed crushing plant that would enable production of bio-diesel in Oregon.

Other sources of renewable energy are already being employed in the region, including wind farms, and methane digesters.

Hydro is another opportunity. Either directly or through irrigation districts, Oregon producers own or control a vast network of canals, piping, and irrigation structures that can support smaller hydroelectric projects which offset pumping costs without affecting fish habitat.

A more immediate promise may come from the wide-open spaces of the state.

“Oregonians may be most familiar with the wind farms that have been under construction in Eastern Oregon,” says Searle. “Larger companies are leasing ground from farmers, but there are also some efforts in creating farmer-owned wind towers. There are also a few local dairies that have built methane digesters to not only effectively deal with animal waste but create electricity that can either be used on the farm or sold to the power companies. We also have food processors utilizing solar energy.”

Kettle Foods in Salem is an example of a processor harnessing the sun for the energy needed to produce its line of potato chips, using a 616-panel solar installation that is the largest such array in the Pacific Northwest, providing enough electricity for up to 15 homes. However, that energy is used primarily to operate its local production facility.

Oregon is in a unique position to promote investment in renewable energy. A business energy tax credit allows 35% of the cost of a project to be used against taxes owed that year or up to five years in the future. There is also the Oregon Energy Trust, which helps fund some projects in certain parts of the state. ODA and the Oregon Department of Energy are among the agencies that continue to identify resources that can be matched with worthy projects related to energy production and efficiency.

ODA director Katy Coba and Oregon Farm Bureau president Barry Bushue jointly support the concepts behind the January 20-21 energy conference in Portland.

“We encourage producers to explore these renewable energy options and network with others who are also thinking more broadly about how they can utilize their natural resource base in a positive way that benefits them economically and Oregon as a whole.”

For more information, contact Brent Searle at (503) 986-4558 or go to:

<<http://www.harvestcleanenergy.org/conference>>