Biodiesel Plant Looks To Poultry Fat For Fuel Feedstock

AMY LORENTZEN, Associated Press Writer

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) - A central Iowa plant could soon begin producing jet fuel from poultry fat.

Bolingbrook, Ill.-based Elevance Renewable Sciences plans to build a $15 million plant in Newton, adding onto an existing biodiesel operation.

The experimental operation plans to use plant oils and poultry fat as building blocks to replace petroleum-based chemicals used to make myriad products, including jet fuel, lubricants, adhesives and even cosmetics and candles.

"It allows us to make a very interesting slate of products, which is different and somewhat in contrast to how poultry fat is used today," said K'Lynne Johnson, Elevance's chief executive officer. "We are taking a waste stream of products ... and using it in a higher value manner."

The project, funded in part by $2.5 million from the U.S. Department of Energy, could get the final go-ahead by late January, Johnson said. The company also is seeking state financial support.

Construction of the plant would create up to 50 jobs, and seven or so permanent positions would be needed to run the biorefinery.

About one-fourth of first-year production would be focused on poultry fat. After that, Johnson said they'll let the market and their partners determine how much of its production would be dedicated to that area.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. poultry industry produces about 1.4 billion pounds of poultry fat every year.

Using Elevance's technology, that fat could produce about 250 million gallons of products including diesel fuel, jet fuel and specialty chemicals that can replace petroleum products, Johnson said. A biofuels processor needs the fat from about 50 chickens to make one gallon of fuel.

"In some ways it subsidizes actual food production because it lets poultry farmers get higher value for every chicken that they raise for food," Johnson said.

Quentin Browell, a spokesman for the International Air Transport Association, a worldwide airlines trade group, said it's looking to other biomass feedstocks such as the camelina plant, jatropha tree and algae for aviation fuel. Although it's not now working with any companies to develop animal fat, Browell said "we also investigate

the feasibility of other sources."

Johnson said Elevance will soon begin talking with airlines now that the company is close to producing a jet fuel blend in large enough volumes for airline testing.

Lucy Norton, managing director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, said a number of refineries in Iowa have the capability of using animal fats to make biodiesel, but the proposed Newton biorefinery would be the first to produce jet fuel and to expand the types of products that could be made from specialty chemicals. She said the technology, once finalized at the demonstration site, could be added to many existing biodiesel plants.

"It's a very exciting project and it's something that's going to help set the stage for what the future of what the biodiesel industry could look like," Norton said. "This type of refinery certainly provides the opportunity to expand the number of products that are coming out of it."

The state Office of Energy Independence also said in a statement that it's excited about the work planned by Elevance.

Nationally, only a handful of companies appear to be working on turning poultry fat into fuel and national renewable fuels trade organizations said they aren't keeping track of the numbers.

The Department of Energy's investment in the planned Newton plant is part of up to $565 million in stimulus money to projects in 15 states aimed at expanding the commercial-scale biomass industry.

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On the Net:

Elevance Renewable Sciences: http://www.elevance.com/ [1]

Department of Energy: http://www.energy.gov/ [2]

Iowa Renewable Fuels Association: http://www.iowarfa.org/ [3]

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