Poet Set To Open Iowa Plant Early Next Year

(AP) — South Dakota-based Poet LLC and its Dutch partner say a cellulosic ethanol plant being built in Iowa will open early next year. By next summer, Poet-DSM Advanced Biofuels should have any glitches worked out at the $250 million Emmetsburg plant stated Steve Hartig, general manager of the joint venture. Ethanol fuel typically is made from corn. The Iowa plant will be the first Poet facility to make the alternative fuel from waste materials such as leaves, corn cobs and cornstalks. "We'll certainly have a few surprises when we start up," Hartig said.

Poet, headquartered in Sioux Falls, is the nation's largest ethanol company. It is working on the Iowa project with Royal DSM, a biotech company based in the Netherlands. The plant will make up to 20 million gallons of ethanol each year and also license the technology to other plants around the world. About 250 construction workers are building the plant next to Poet's ethanol plant in Emmetsburg. The cellulosic part of the operation will have about 40 employees. The joint venture also has opened a Sioux Falls office with two employees in sales and finance. DSM, which invested $150 million in the plant, is bringing expertise in the use of enzymes and yeasts to the project. Poet brings experience in building and operating ethanol plants.

Besides a working partnership, the companies share a vision of making the world less reliant on fossil fuels. The Iowa plant has been dubbed "Project Liberty." "It's time to get our world moving toward a bio-based economy," said Matt Merrit, a spokesman for the venture. "Really, looking forward, we need to get back to that sustainable lifestyle." Hartig said another cellulosic plant likely will someday be built in South Dakota. "If you look at the sweet spot for corn production, it's in Iowa (and) South Dakota," he said.

Poet-DSM is not the only company working to produce cellulosic fuel and meet federal standards for incorporating biofuels into consumer fuel. DuPont Co. also is working on an Iowa plant. Hartig said he wants other companies to succeed so the industry can succeed. "There is enough space for all of us," he said. "We need to show this is real."

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