

Sunflowers Shows Promise as an Energy Crop

Everett, Washington. That bright yellow full-bloom sunflower field on Joe Heineck's Sunnyside farm near Everett, Washington is not just a picturesque post card (and bee's paradise), but a vision of potential Pacific Northwest Oilfields.



Heineck noted, "Despite late planting in a cold and wet early summer, the plants have developed quite well and hopefully there will be enough heat remaining in this growing season for the seeds to archive their full oil and feed potential."

Heineck is working with Ion Manea, director of Auburn-based FLOWER POWER USA (FPUSA), a company dedicated to producing a renewable fuel called "Agrofuel™". The planting is one of several in Washington State to test the advantages of sunflower as a locally cultivated source for "Agrofuel™". Manea and Heineck are impressed with the results so far.

To help organize the growing interest in short-season sunflower seed for clean farm fuel, Manea, formed Heritage Farm Cooperative (HFC) . Under Manea's leadership, HFC is pursuing the project with technical assistance to the local farmers that includes agronomics, oil extraction and the practical use of Agrofuel™ in farm equipment. "Agrofuel™ will reduce farming costs, preserve rural jobs, and keep the air clean," said Manea.



For example, in Yakima Valley, HFC is teaming up with Heritage University's program called Students in Free Enterprise and also with scientists from Washington, Oregon and Pennsylvania State Universities. The team will implement a US Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant for providing technical assistance to limited-resource small farms to produce renewable fuel and feed.

"Farm production and usage of fuel from locally grown oilseeds compares favorably to other alternative fuel which require investments, feedstock supplies and technical expertise beyond the small farmer's means," said Manea.

While HFC is working on the farming and supply side, FPUSA is focusing on transferring the appropriate technology and developing the public and private sector market.

Currently, FPUSA has been awarded a USDA Value Added Grant for planning activities related to renewable fuel marketing and distribution on local farms.



HFC is looking to expand its growing base by increasing membership on both sides of the Cascades. The cooperative members plan to share modern farming equipment and store the harvest on-farm until a mobile seed crusher arrives to their community.

While a lot has been done on the farming and technology side of the project, more needs to be done in the area of public support and endorsement.

HFC and FPUSA consider that it will be of regional interest to:

- Have public resources made available for community investment in modern farm and post harvest equipment and technologies such as specialized planters, harvesters and food grade seed drying and natural oil grade extractors.
- Expand the federal and local incentives for farm production and use of natural renewable fuels.
- Create incentives for energy crops and associated biobased products.

Heritage Farm Cooperative and Flower Power USA, Inc., are Equal Opportunity Employers and Service Providers and are encouraging any renewable fuel supporter to visit www.agrofuel.org.

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