

Mendota firm gets \$1.5M for bioenergy testing

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A Mendota biofuel company will be using a \$1.5 million grant from the California Energy Commission to test the feasibility of converting sugar beets and agricultural waste into ethanol and other forms of clean energy.

Mendota Bioenergy, LLC, is one of six recipients of grants recently approved by the CEC to help start projects that will reduce petroleum use, cut pollution and provide California jobs by advancing the manufacture of biofuels and the use of alternative fuels and electric vehicles.

If proven feasible, the project could convert 840,000 tons of sugar beets and 80,000 tons of farm biowaste each year into 33.5 million gallons of ethanol; 1.6 million standard cubic feet of biomethane for making compressed natural gas (CNG); 6.3 megawatts of certified green electricity; and high-nutrient compost and liquid fertilizer.

In addition, the project is expected to create approximately 250 direct and 50 indirect construction jobs in Mendota, along with 50 long-term jobs at the biorefinery and an additional 50 jobs for feedstock operations.

Approximately 160 new laborers and agricultural workers will be needed to support additional sugar beet production on 40 area farms while the ethanol and CNG produced would replace 23 million gallons of gasoline and diesel fuel each year, cutting greenhouse gas emissions from petroleum by 45 percent for ethanol and 86 percent for CNG.

The University of California Davis and IR1 Group are participating as project developers and engineering consultants. Together the project team will provide \$1,578,461 in matching funds.

Other beneficiaries of the CEC's Alternative and Renewable Fuel and Vehicle Transportation program include Sacramento-based Clean World Partners with \$1.3 million for a biomethane production facility, G4 Insights, Inc. of Placer County with \$1.2 million for natural gas studies using forest waste, Silicon Valley-based Wrightspeed, Inc. with \$1.2 million for digital drive systems and retrofit kits for commercial trucks, Santa Barbara-based Biodiesel Industries with \$886,815 for enhancing biodiesel plant operations and Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo with \$250,000 to demonstrate technology that produces oil-rich algae while simultaneously treating wastewater.

State's Kettleman City study 'flawed,' activists say

By Lewis Griswold, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, Dec. 2, 2010

KETTLEMAN CITY -- A state study of 11 cases of birth defects in tiny Kettleman City in Kings County was incomplete and flawed, activists said Thursday.

Last week, the California Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Public Health released a report that found no "conclusive cause" for the birth defects in Kettleman City from 2007 to early 2010.

Some of the birth defects involved facial deformities such as cleft palate; three of the babies died.

Kettleman City is near Waste Management's Kettleman Hills toxic waste landfill. Activists have said that emissions from the landfill might be causing the birth defects. The company has said its operation is safe.

Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, based in San Francisco, and People for Clean Air and Water, based in Kettleman City, issued a six-page response to the state's draft report prior to a public hearing scheduled by the state agencies on the report.

"We believe the state agencies did not look hard enough," the activist organizations' report said. "The investigation of pesticide exposure, toxic waste contamination and disposal, the contaminated water supply and other pollution sources was incomplete and flawed."

A more thorough and comprehensive investigation is needed, they said.

Later, about 100 people attended the public meeting. Many of them said that while the birth defects are sad, what the town really needs is clean drinking water.

"The water comes out yellow and stinks," said Guadalupe Martinez of Kettleman City. "When I wash the clothes and take them off the line, they stink. I have to wash them twice sometimes."

Dr. Kevin Reilly, head of the California Department of Public Health, told community members that the state was working with the local community services district to figure out the best way to get better drinking water in town. Wells in Kettleman City have high levels of arsenic, which can cause cancer and other problems.

Some Kettleman City residents who attended the meeting defended the landfill and said the focus of attention needs to be on water quality.

"I don't like the propaganda brought here by outsiders," said Ralph Sanchez, a drum storage technician. "We need better water. Let's move forward. Let's get past the blame game."