

Chamber Gets a Bio-Diesel Feasibility Grant

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LITTLE ROCK - Southern Financial Partners awarded the Phillips County Chamber of Commerce a \$30,000 grant to commission a "site-specific bio-diesel feasibility study." This study will be based on soybean production in the area and how well the integrated processing and manufacturing facility would work in Phillips County.

The facility may be capable of producing 10 million gallons of fuel a year. According to the research done, "Bio-diesel is essentially fatty acid alkyl esters and offers a range of environmental benefits unrivalled by any other alternative fuel. It is a sustainable and a renewable product with very positive energy balances. It is manufactured from recovered vegetable oils (RVO) and therefore offers an environmentally enhancing use for these products. It is safely biodegradable and non-toxic. Bio-diesel can be used straight or as a blend in place of fossil diesel, without modification, in diesel powered engines.

Life cycle emissions of greenhouse gases from bio-diesel are 55 percent lower than fossil diesel. The emissions of carbon monoxide (a poisonous gas) from bio-diesel are on average 40 percent lower than carbon monoxide emissions from diesel."

The Phillips County Chamber of Commerce has championed bio-diesel as a new value-added industry that is well suited for development in Phillips County. "This will provide a new market for our farmers and allow us to better utilize our assets," commented Tom Turner, executive director of the Phillips County Chamber of Commerce. Phillips County has a strong comparative advantage in bio-diesel production with extensive soybean production, excellent river, road, and rail transport links and historical chemical and fertilizer production in the area.

"Bio-diesel is a perfect fit for the county. It represents another market for our farmers. It will create jobs locally, while lessening the nation's dependence on foreign oil," said Turner.

"Proximity to supply inputs and ease in distribution combined with local know-how make this an ideal venture for Phillips County," said Ben Steinberg, president of Southern Financial Partners. "We believe that the Chamber of Commerce has done an excellent job identifying the opportunity and developing it. As part of the Phillips County

Strategic Community Plan, we're happy to lend some financial support to the Chamber to help make this happen."

The announcement is taking place at the Mississippi Delta Grassroots Caucus annual conference where innovative ideas and best practices in rural development from the region are being shared and disseminated.

Winrock International and the Phillips County Chamber of Commerce will conduct the study.