

PRESS RELEASE

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WARRENTON MAYOR TELLS SENATE ENERGY COMMITTEE TO SUPPORT SMALL BIOREFINERIES

Mayor George Fitch of Warrenton, Virginia told the US Senate Energy Committee at its Transportation Biofuels Conference on February 1 that local communities can be a major contributor to the goal of 20 billion gallons of renewable fuel.

He said he has embarked on a plan for an integrated biorefinery at the landfill site which would produce 10 million gallons of ethanol and 8MW of electricity from a wide variety of wastes and residues.

“Most of the feedstocks would come from municipal solid wastes including construction debris which now are being buried at the landfill emitting greenhouse gases. This amounts to more than 100,000 tons annually of useable waste that can be converted into energy. The reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from a biorefinery using wastes would be over 50%,” Mayor Fitch commented.

These wastes would be augmented by other wastes such as the sewer sludge from the treatment plant. As Mayor Fitch remarked, “we spend \$40,000 a year to have someone come by and pick up our sewer sludge to take it outside the county and dump it on some farm, which I’m sure doesn’t please the neighbors. Instead, we could get paid \$40,000 by selling our sludge to a biorefinery.

In addition to the urban wastes, Mayor Fitch pointed that there are substantial forest residues and agriculture residues just lying around. The corn farmers just let their husks and stalks (called stover) lie on ground. “What’s not needed for soil replenishment could be gathered up and delivered to the nearby biorefinery,” he said. Also, we have 5,000 acres of soybeans in the county and the stubble could also be collected and delivered. Likewise, with the leftover from the thinning of our woods. There are about 40 thinnings a year in the county on both public and private lands. The tops and bottoms of trees as well as limbs are just left there. Other woody biomass material for the biorefinery would come from tree trimming contractors, sawdust and chips from mills and brush and leaves from residents.

“We’ve estimated there are about 10,000 tons of forest residues, 5,000 to 20,000 tons of collectible agriculture residue and another 5,000 to 7,000 tons of sewer sludge and animal manures which could be used as feedstock for the plant. “I’ve been told there are more carbons in a 10 cent bushel of manure than a \$4 bushel of corn.” the Mayor said.

“We don’t expect to get much of the agriculture residue at the beginning because it will take awhile to solve the infrastructure problem of efficiently harvesting, gathering, storing and transporting the corn stover. Right now, it’s trial and error. We hope to involve John Deere which has developed a machine that allows just a single pass to pick up the grain and the residue at the same time. This would reduce the cost of corn stover to the biorefinery by at least \$10 per ton.

He went on to say, “further down the road, we hope to add switchgrass or miscanthus to the mix of feedstocks. We have a lot of idled farmland as well as Conservation Reserve Program land for that purpose. It’s land that is not being used. In fact, in Virginia half of the 8 million acres of farmland is not being used. Some of our farmers have already started to experiment with switchgrass.”

He pointed out that the technology seems to have evolved so you can use a wide variety of biomass material to co produce ethanol and electricity at an integrated biorefinery. He added, “we are looking at three different gasification technologies from three different companies for our project.”

Mayor Fitch told the committee and audience, “there are a lot of communities like Warrenton across the country, certainly hundreds if not thousands, which could be self sufficient in renewable energy. Like Warrenton, they have a variety of biomass material right in their backyard. Collectively, that represents billions of gallons of ethanol or renewable diesel – and all of it made from waste and residues.”

“That is a major contribution, which I think has been overlooked, to the goal of 20 billion gallons of renewable fuel by the 2020. The focus seems to be on creating large scale biorefineries producing 50 to 100 million gallons a year by the ADM’s and Cargill’s of the world. Communities like mine are just as valuable. Perhaps more so because we can engage the people in our community to get behind our renewable energy initiative and be a stakeholder.”

Mayor Fitch added, the economics of small scale biorefineries now work. It used to be that you needed at least 3,000 to 5,000 tons of feedstock per day to be economical. Not any more. Our model shows that 300 to 500 tons per day will be profitable; provided it produces both ethanol and electricity.”

Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina told the audience, “Mr. Mayor, you have stimulated our thinking. We need to think about small scale biorefineries across the country using different types of wastes. He added, “decentralization of renewable energy would give our country more energy security.”

Mayor Fitch said that local governments should facilitate the development of renewable energy because they are uniquely positioned to do so. “We have control or certainly influence over the entire stream of the product, downstream and upstream. That’s what makes the major integrated oil companies so efficient: control from under the ground to the gas pump. Wastes, residues, and energy crops to make renewable energy is an ideal format for a public-private partnership”, he concluded. “We hope to show how efficient that can be. With encouragement from Congress, other communities across the country will follow this model.”

Other panelists at the conference were representatives from Dupont, Chevron and Ford.

For more information, you can contact Mayor Fitch directly at: (540) 347-1101.

