

OPINION

Take part in next generation of biofuels

LAST month, I had the opportunity to tour the Show Me Energy Cooperative facility near Centerview. Along with a deeper appreciation for energy entrepreneurship, it gave me a glimpse into a brighter energy future.

Renewable energy sources such as ethanol, biodiesel, wind farms and solar power are already being cultivated in

OUR VIEW

Missouri — benefiting not just farmers, but also many rural communities. What I witnessed at the Show Me Energy plant, however, leads me to believe that Missouri has the resources and inge-

nity to become a real leader in future bioenergy solutions.

The current petroleum-based energy paradigm is no longer sustainable. That is reality. Our nation and the world are desperately searching for new energy solutions. We've come to realize that energy, economic development, national security and environmental quality are all linked. Meanwhile, farmers are being

challenged to provide a portion of our nation's energy while continuing to produce abundant, safe, and affordable food and fiber.

I discovered in Centerview that cellulosic biomass holds much potential in our energy future. Biodegradable outputs from industry, agriculture, forestry and households can be used to produce energy feedstocks; examples include spoiled hay, grass seed, corn stover, straw, underbrush in timber stands, manure from livestock operations, municipal sewage and food leftovers.

Think local, sustainable

Missouri corn and soybean growers have shown how the agriculture sector can become modern-day energy providers, but we can play a larger role. The opportunity exists for crop, livestock, poultry, forage and timber producers to form more cooperatives and supply bioenergy to communities throughout the state.

Wind energy and solar power are good. Add biomass, the most widely available and dependable energy source, and you've got a mix of domestic energy sources that contribute to a sustainable energy plan for our communities.

Energy policy reform

It's vital that Congress also finds ways to alleviate soaring energy costs for American farmers and ranchers. As we were going to press, the New Energy Reform Act of 2008, or New ERA, was being debated in the U.S. Senate. This legislation would bring significant investments in cellulosic biofuels and other fuels from the farm. A bipartisan group of senators, led by Sen. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., and Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., launched the New ERA. A comprehensive blueprint for a national energy policy, it would include responsible offshore drilling to ease the price of oil and gas immediately. Most importantly, it would direct robust new investment in alternative fuels and stronger gasoline conservation efforts. The goal of the New ERA is to move as much as 85% of the nation's trucks and cars to alternative fuels within 20 years — an Apollo Project-like effort supported by \$20 billion in new federal funds collected from the oil and gas industry.

I urge you to contact your legislators and voice your opinion on this future-changing national energy policy.

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