

ISU facility testing new food-safety technology

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — An Atlanta-based company recently finished building a \$4 million electronic linear accelerator test and demonstration facility at Idaho State University to research a cheaper and more effective method of using the technology to improve food safety and shelf life.

Dolan Falconer, CEO of ScanTech Sciences, said the facility, housed within the university's 216,000-square-foot Research and Innovation in Science and Engineering Complex, uses a process called electronic cold pasteurization to bombard food with accelerated electrons.

ECP enables commodities to be harvested "at the peak of ripeness" with a long shelf life, while controlling pests and destroying pathogens such as salmonella and E. coli without the need for chemicals. ECP has also inhibited sprouting in potatoes by up to 18 months.

Similar technology has been used in the medical industry, and in food to a limited degree by companies such as Schwan's and Omaha Steaks.

But ScanTech's approach to irradiating food is faster, more effective and "orders of magnitude" cheaper, said RISE Complex director Eric Burgett.

"We're helping to engineer and design much more economic ways to do this," Burgett said, adding produce moves on a conveyor during treatment at ISU's new research and development facility at 60 feet per minute.



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Dolan Falconer, chief executive officer of ScanTech Sciences Inc., demonstrates how to treat produce using a new electronic linear accelerator at Idaho State University's RISE Complex, which his company financed to research how to treat food with a process known as electron beam cold pasteurization. His company already has plans to break ground on a commercial facility in McAllen, Texas, and ISU intends to train personnel for the burgeoning industry.

ScanTech plans breaking ground on its first commercial facility using the technology within 14 to 18 months in McAllen, Texas. The Texas plant will have the capacity to process 10 to 20 truckloads of produce per day, with the conveyor designed to run at 120 feet per minute. The location was chosen based on the high volume of food that moves through that region for international trade.

"We have taken that device and we have optimized it for food," Falconer said.

Burgett said ISU com-

menced pilot-scale testing in 2014 and brought its testing facility online a few days ago. ISU will help research treatment parameters that maximize benefits without impairing quality for specific commodities. Burgett said ISU students will focus thesis work on the technology, and the university also plans to develop a technician program to train operators.

Falconer envisions the technology will eventually become the industry standard, and he anticipates expanding to additional loca-

tions with port access, such as Oregon or Washington.

"We believe the longterm demand will be substantial — that the technology will be wanted by many in the industry, so we'll have plenty of opportunities to (expand)," Falconer said.

Falconer said the technology has already been approved for use by USDA and the major export markets. He said the company's first priority after forming in 2009 was "getting the government to approve the treatment methodology here in the U.S."

Final fuel levels scald chicken producers, while leaving corn producers wanting

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

EPA's release on Monday of its final volume requirement levels under the Renewable Fuels Standard program for 2014 through 2016 is a blow to U.S. chicken producers and a mixed bag for U.S. corn producers.

The largest component of renewable fuels is corn-based ethanol, and the final levels required to be blended with transportation fuel are higher than EPA's proposed volumes in June, yet not as high as mandated by Congress.

The higher volumes will increase the cost of feed to poultry and livestock producers and raise the cost of fuel and food to consumers, National Chicken Council President Mike Brown stated in a press release.

"Since the RFS was enacted, chicken producers alone have incurred more than \$50 billion in higher actual feed costs due to the ethanol mandates, and the tab keeps getting run up under this broken law," he said.

On the other side of the equation, corn growers are pleased with the upward revision but displeased that volumes are not as high as

EPA renewable fuel level mandates

The Environmental Protection Agency's Renewable Fuels Standard program requirements have direct economic consequences for farmers and livestock producers.

Mandated by Congress	(Billions of gallons)			
Item	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total renewable fuels	18.2	20.5	22.3	24
Conventional biofuel (corn)	14.4	15	15	15

EPA proposed, June 2015

Item	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total renewable fuels	15.9	16.3	17.4	—
Conventional biofuel (corn)	13.3	13.4	14	—

By fuel type	2014 ¹	2015 ¹	2016	2017
Cellulosic biofuel	0.03	0.12	0.23	n/a
Biomass-based diesel	1.6	1.7	1.9	2
Advanced biofuels*	2.7	2.9	3.6	n/a
Conventional biofuel (corn)	13.6	14.1	14.5	n/a
Total renewable fuels	16.3	16.9	18.1	n/a

¹Levels reflect actual amount of domestic use. *Includes cellulosic and biomass-based.

Source: EPA data compiled by Capital Press Capital Press graphic

Congress mandated.

EPA's revision is a step forward, but "any reduction in the statutory amount will have a negative impact on the economy, the energy sector and the environment," National Corn Growers Association President Chip Bowling said in a written statement.

Cattle producers aren't enthused by EPA's decision, as any increase in RFS levels has the potential to distort

prices. But it doesn't change the overall position of National Cattlemen's Beef Association, said Chase Adams, NCBA director of communications.

"We have never opposed ethanol production, only the mandate. Anytime you have the government picking one user over another, you create distortion in the price. We've always advocated for a level playing field," he said.

Brown said that in setting the domestic mandates, EPA did not account for the amount of ethanol that is exported. Exports divert additional corn away from the domestic feed and food market, he said.

Combined, 2014 and 2015 ethanol exports are likely to divert the equivalent of an additional 600 million bushels of corn away from feed and food use, in addition to what is mandated by the RFS, he said.

The corn ethanol mandate at 14.5 billion gallons would require more than 5 billion bushels of corn, according to the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service.

National Corn Growers Association contends the RFS has been one of the most successful energy policies in the U.S., benefiting the economy, energy independence and the environment.

The country should be strengthening its commitment to renewable fuels, not backing down by reducing statutory levels in the RFS, Bowling said.

"In light of EPA's decision, we are evaluating our options. We will fight to protect the rights of farmers and consumers and hold EPA accountable," he stated.

Funding questions loom over food safety overhaul

U.S. Food and Drug Administration seeks added money for 2016

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

PORTLAND — As the U.S. Food and Drug Administration prepares to implement new food safety regulations, questions linger about its ability to fully fund the strategy.

In 2010, when Congress was debating the Food Safety Modernization Act, the Congressional Budget Office estimated that FDA would need an additional \$583 million to enforce the law over five years.

Since the statute was passed in 2011, though, the agency has received only about \$162 million, said Michael Taylor, its deputy commissioner for foods and veterinary medicine.

Now that key FSMA rules have been finalized, the agency is asking Congress for nearly \$110 million to begin compliance efforts in 2016, he said at a Dec. 1 meeting in Portland.

Without that level of funding, Taylor said he'd anticipate "delay and disruption" in implementing the law.

"There's only so much you can squeeze," he said. "We have very hard decisions to make."

Even if FDA receives its full request, that would still bring total FSMA funding to \$272 million — less than half of CBO's estimated need for five years.

However, Taylor said the agency will likely be able to implement the statute with a lower funding level because it's realigning existing staff around the law rather than relying solely on new hires.

"We're taking pains to do this efficiently," he said.

Most farmers' interaction with the new food safety system will occur through state agriculture departments, which are better equipped to implement the law on-the-ground than FDA, Taylor said.

"We don't have the resources, we don't have the

presence, we don't have the knowledge," he said, adding that state agencies will need federal money to help implement FSMA.

"We can't expect it to happen as an unfunded mandate," Taylor said.

Regulations implementing FSMA are targeted at several sectors of the food industry, including farmers, manufacturers and foreign suppliers.

The FDA can't prioritize enforcing the rules for one of these sectors without creating an uneven playing field — for example, if domestic producers were scrutinized more closely than foreign suppliers, he said.

"We can't just fund parts of FSMA," said Katy Coba, director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture. "We've got to have full funding to make this work correctly."

Gail Greenman, director of national affairs for the Oregon Farm Bureau, urged growers attending the recent event to contact their congressional delegations to support funding for FSMA's implementation.

"When that request comes from the ground, from the grower, it represents more than anything we can do," she said.

It's unclear exactly how state agriculture departments will carry out FSMA, but it's possible the FDA will establish cooperative agreements with these agencies detailing their duties to inspect farms, said Stephanie Page, director of food safety and animal health at ODA.

ODA would like to learn the specifics as soon as possible because the agency must obtain authorization from the Oregon Legislature for new positions, even if they're funded with federal dollars, Page said.

At this point, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture is developing a blueprint outlining a possible cooperative structure with the FDA, she said.

The blueprint will allow state agencies to have an "off the shelf" plan ready for when funding does become available, Page said. "We're trying to be as prepared as we possibly can without taking on unfunded work."

Bayer CEO to address FarWest conference

Ag departments share complaint response process

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The head of Bayer CropScience will address the FarWest AgriBusiness Association's annual winter conference.

Bayer CEO James Blome will speak during the conference at noon Dec. 9 at the Three Rivers Convention Center in Kennewick, Wash. The conference is Dec. 8-10 in Kennewick, Wash.

Bayer is involved with pollinator issues, GMOs and seed treatments. Blome is also vice chair of CropLife America, the U.S. trade association representing crop control and pesticide manufacturers and distributors.

Blome will provide an industry view, said Jim Fitzgerald, executive director of the association, based in Spokane.

"How do we respond to what some call social conscience," Fitzgerald said, citing GMO and pesticide concerns. "There's fear and apprehension, so how do we satisfy that, put that into relation with feeding the world and feeding ourselves?"

The conference also includes a state pesticide complaint and response panel at 8 a.m. Dec. 10. Representatives from five departments of agriculture will share the response process when members of the public make a complaint about a real or perceived chemical application threat.

"The full gamut of pesticide-related complaints" will be addressed, Fitzgerald said. "I think it's going to be helpful for

the people in our audience to hear how that process goes."

FarWest represents the fertilizer and agriculture chemical industry in Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

"These are quite often agronomists that work for retailers who interface with customers, who are the farmers," Fitzgerald said. "They do everything from soil tests to crop consulting — what kind of fertility, pest control, how to maximize yields."

The conference includes several course tracks, including agronomics, new technology, safety and regulatory requirements, management and a new track offered this year, maintenance service. Ag-Tester representative John Dignan will also speak.

"What happens if you have a bad wiring harness or a short circuit — how do you fix that, how do you troubleshoot?" Fitzgerald asked. "Once you figure out the problem, how are you going to source the replacement parts? Equally important is, how do you test those new parts before you go to all the trouble to install them? Before you plug them in, you want to know everything is operating as it should."

FarWest holds an additional regional conference Jan. 12-14 in Twin Falls, Idaho.

Baby food company accused of mislabeling

Lawsuit claims ingredients were misrepresented

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

The Gerber baby food company is accused of misleading consumers by labeling a cereal snack with fruits and vegetables that aren't contained in the product.

Nancy Henry, an Oregon

resident, has filed a lawsuit against Gerber and its parent company, Nestle USA, alleging that they violated the Oregon Unlawful Trade Practices Act by misrepresenting the ingredients in its Gerber Graduate Puffs.

The lawsuit seeks class action status and \$200 in compensation for every consumer who bought the products, as well as an injunction against future mislabeling.

The plaintiff claims that the Puff brands use the names

and images of sweet potatoes and bananas while they actually contain only apple puree.

Similarly, the product called Gerber Peach Puffs contains less than 2 percent peach juice concentrate, the lawsuit alleges. "The Puff products contain no dietary fiber — a key substance found in fruits and vegetables — and contain vitamins only due to a process of synthetic vitamin fortification."

Capital Press was unable to reach an attorney represent-

ing Gerber and Nestle USA for comment as of press time.

Litigation over food labeling has been skyrocketing in recent years, according to a study by Nicole Negowetti, a law professor who has studied the issue at Valparaiso University Law School in Indiana.

While only 19 such cases were filed in 2008, that number had climbed to more than 100 by 2012, according to a statistic cited in Negowetti's report.