

Nobel laureate says

Wild plants a source of crude oil

By Debbie Howlett
Of the Emerald

Growing and harvesting a crop of "wild plants" to supply at least part of the nation's need for crude oil, upon a first look, doesn't seem to make a great deal of sense. But, to Melvin Calvin, a Nobel Prize winning chemist, that idea could be the end of an era in the United States.

Identifying his research as "more current than you would perhaps imagine," Calvin, at a Tuesday afternoon press conference, said "the trick, it seems to me, is to avoid (political) involvement."

To avoid that involvement, Calvin says Americans need to become independent in their need for oil. One way to achieve that independence, Calvin says, is to produce plants, such as the milkweed, that crude oil can be obtained from.

Calvin, who is credited with discovering photosynthesis in plants, is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. He explains that the finite reserve of crude oil need not be the only source of oil for people's needs.

"The reserves we now have were once produced by green plants," Calvin said. "We should now harvest the annual production instead of waiting a 100 million years."

Calvin explained that the plants needed to produce crude oil are abundant and easily grown, given the right climate.



Photo by Mark Pynes

Melvin Calvin, Nobel laureate, will lecture at 9:30 a.m. today in the EMU Forum Room.

"They exist all over, there are thousands of different kinds," Calvin says, "it's a matter of choosing the species that fits that part of the region." As an example, Calvin used the milkweed plant, a common, un-domesticated weed. The milkweed, says Calvin, produces a latex substance that crude oil can be derived from.

"The problem is to extract the hydrocarbons," Calvin says. "Some plants you can tap like you would to get maple

syrup. Just stick in a spigot, and let it drip out."

Other plants like the milkweed and gopher plants in eastern Oregon, according to Calvin, can be cut and harvested much like hay, and in a relatively simple process, crude oil can be extracted. About 8 percent of the total plant weight would be crude oil, 20 percent would be sugar and 50 percent would be used as fuel for steam to extract the oil and sugar.

An area of land the size of Arizona, could supply about 20 percent of the nation's fuel needs, about 2 million barrels of crude oil per day, says Calvin. He also stresses that that figure is from wild plants. Once a plant is domesticated, Calvin predicts that the yield could increase tremendously.

Oil companies are interested, not in major proportions Calvin says, but enough to give some financial support.

"I got a check yesterday from Mobil, although it was a small check," Calvin says.

Calvin also says that one oil company has sunk about \$10 million into research. He declined to name the company but said that there is an increasing interest in this process.

As far as Calvin is concerned, the process could be put into effect tomorrow, if the financial support was there.

Health faire provides a body's view

A Hands-on experience was the theme of Tuesday's seventh annual Health Faire.

Participants got the chance to use biofeedback, test their lung capacity, heart rate, blood pressure and measure body fat. There was also a computer that gave an approximate lifespan on the basis of 20 questions (it is uncertain how reliable the test is — some people were finding out they should have been dead years ago!) About 40 agencies had information available.

"The agencies have been very creative," says Kathleen Benafel, director of the health fair. "People are eager to find out about health and that means more than just nutrition. They like to hear and see things happen and they want to see for themselves."

The Willamalane Kitchen Band, made up of seven senior citizens, performed because "we wanted seniors involved. They are just as important as any other group and they always seem to get left out," Benafel says. To round out the program, the fair presented a puppet show with a moral pointing out the problems of the handicapped.

et al.

MEETINGS

The Condon Society will hold its first meeting of spring term today at 4:30 p.m. in Room 47, Geology Building.

SPEAKERS

"Verga's Fiction and French Naturalism" is the topic of a lecture by Dr. Giovanni Cecchetti, University of California at Los Angeles, today at 3:30 p.m. in Gerlinger Lounge.

Abortion and the law is the topic of a panel discussion sponsored by Episcopal Campus Ministry today from 12:30-1:30 p.m. in Room 111, EMU. Panel members will include Laura Parrish, attorney; Patti Van Metre, Planned Parenthood; Cleora Mersdorf, working for the

Human Life Amendment; Diane Nye, National Abortion Rights League; and Clint Bryant, National Right to Life Association.

"New World in the Old: Change and Continuity in Spain and America" is the topic of a lecture by Dr. Ida Altman, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, today at 5 p.m. in Room 184, PLC. The lecture is sponsored by the history department and is open to the public.

"What's Going On in Jerusalem?" is the topic of a lecture by a speaker from the Muslim Students' Association today at 7:30 p.m. in Room 167, EMU.

WORKSHOPS

"Balancing Family and School," is the topic of a

workshop, sponsored by University Women in Transition, today at 3 p.m. in Room 337, EMU. Margie Holland and Betty Dale, Lane Community College counselors, will lead the workshop.

Bankruptcy and its alternatives is the topic of a workshop led by attorney Eric Haws, today at 7:30 p.m. at the Central Presbyterian Church, 15th Avenue and Ferry Street. For more information, call 342-8255.

FILMS

"Batik in Java" is the topic of a slide show by local artist Dee Curwen today at 7:30 p.m. in the EMU Forum. Curwen's presentation will include examples of work brought back from a recent trip to Java.

MISCELLANEOUS

Pre-meds: Marliss Strange has information on a premedical scholarship for the 1982-83 school year. To apply you must be eligible for financial aid. For more information, drop by Room 164, Oregon Hall.

A benefit dinner for the April 24th Coalition to End The War in El Salvador will be held Thursday from 5-9 p.m. at the Keystone Cafe, Fifth Avenue and Lawrence Street. Polish food will be served. \$4-\$6 sliding scale.

Money for medical school: There are several scholarships available to University students accepted to medical schools. Please see Marliss Strange, Room 164, Oregon Hall, before Monday.

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