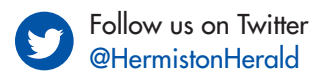


Herald Business



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The interior of Novus Energy's mobile demonstration plant, housed in a 53-foot semi-trailer. The full-size Boardman plant is expected to generate 987,000 mmBTU of renewable natural gas per year.

USDA backs Boardman biorefinery

Company to process farm waste to fuel

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Staff Writer

With financing in place, a Minnesota-based energy company plans to build its first commercial refinery that will transform farm waste into natural gas and liquid fertilizer at the Port of Morrow.

Novus Energy has received an \$11 million loan guarantee from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's biorefinery assistance program. Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley and USDA Rural Development Undersecretary Lisa Mensah made the announcement Friday in Portland.

"This biorefinery will spur economic development, create new jobs and provide new markets for farm commodities in rural Oregon," Mensah said.

Novus plans to take 750 tons of food waste every day — things like potato peels, onion skins and dairy manure — and convert it into renewable gas at the facility. By allowing the scraps to ferment in tanks, organic material breaks down and releases methane that can be captured and stored.

Joe Burke, Novus president and CEO, said the company has found a way to make that process 40 percent more efficient and is now ready for commercial-scale production.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A rendering of Novus Energy's proposed renewable natural gas facility at the Port of Morrow.

"This biorefinery will spur economic development, create new jobs and provide new markets for farm commodities in rural Oregon."

— Lisa Mensah

USDA Rural Development Undersecretary

The issue ultimately came down to financing. Despite successful tests, Burke said banks wouldn't lend them money. However, the 2014 Farm Bill expanded the USDA's biorefinery program to allow the agency to invest in advanced biofuels and renewable chemicals.

Mensah said Novus is one of the first companies to receive a loan under that expansion.

"It's a very competitive program," Mensah told the *East Oregonian*. "We are pleased to see this innovation happening in rural America."

Novus will break ground on its facility at the port later this summer, Burke said, which will be located near Boardman Foods. The total cost is \$25 million, and the plant will provide 5-10 permanent, full-time jobs.

At full operation, Novus will produce 3.8 million cubic feet of renewable gas each day. That's more than 28 million gallons, which will be pumped directly into the Cascade pipeline on their property. A subsidiary of BP is signed on to buy the fuel.

The plant will also generate 350 gallons of liquid fertilizer daily.

"We're taking waste and turning it into valuable resources. We're very excited about that," Burke said.

Smith appointed to second small business committee

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepburn, is representing small businesses on another state committee.



Greg Smith

Smith was appointed by House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, as co-chair of the newly created Special Committee on Small Business Growth. Earlier in February Gov. Kate Brown also appointed him to the Governor's Small Business Advisory Cabinet.

Smith is the only Eastern Oregon representative on either committee.

The House committee's primary goals are to gather industry-specific information on small business needs, identify solutions to maintain and grow small businesses in those

industries and develop recommendations and draft legislation for the 2017 session.

In addition to his legislative duties, Smith is also a small business owner specializing in economic development and commercial and industrial financing. He said in a news release that his hope is to bring "private sector experience and rural perspective" to the committee's work.

Chamber lunch features agri-tourism consultant

Janet Dodson, a consultant for the EOVA (Eastern Oregon Visitor Association) Agri-Tourism Committee, is the guest speaker at the upcoming Boardman Chamber of Commerce luncheon.

The no-host gathering is Wednesday, March 16, at noon at the Port of Morrow, 2

Marine Drive, Boardman. The meal is \$12 per person.

Those who plan to attend need to RSVP by Friday, March 11, by calling 541-481-3014.

Stripe rust found in irrigated wheat field

Stripe rust was recently spotted in an irrigated wheat field near Hermiston, according to scientists with Oregon State University.

It is the first report of the fungal disease in Eastern Oregon in 2016. Stripe rust grows on the leaves of wheat plants and can reduce yield in severe cases.

Larry Lutcher, soil scientist with OSU Extension Service in Morrow County, said the disease is thus far limited to just one field. It has not yet been found in any dryland wheat.

Stripe rust tends to thrive in cool, moist conditions when farmers would otherwise expect a promising harvest, Lutcher said. The last year with substantial rust damage came in 2012.

"There's more rain, more humidity, more leaf

tissue and more opportunity for the fungus to grow," Lutcher said.

The early start to rust season suggests farmers should take extra care scouting their fields, Lutcher said. Fungicides can help if the infection is found and treated early.

Dryland fields emerge much later than irrigated wheat. However, growers should be aware of the potential for rust later in the season.

Untreated stripe rust, which is also known as yellow rust, can reduce wheat yields by 40 percent or more, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The disease is caused by spores and the spores can be spread by wind.

Fields infected by stripe rust are commonly treated with a fungicide spray.



STAFF PHOTO BY GARY L. WEST

Stripe rust is shown in a Umatilla County wheat field in this file photo from June 2011. A case of stripe rust has been found in an irrigated wheat field near Hermiston this year.

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