

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

Bandwagon rolls for 'tree power'

Those who should know better now join the "alternative" fuels maniacs who are destroying the environment.

On March 2, an announcement was made that a California energy research institution awarded a grant of \$650,000 for tests on burning trees for "biomass" power. Strange things are done every day, but in this case the grant comes from an agency that should know better—the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), based in Palo Alto, California, which represents the nation's electric utility companies and funds basic research into nuclear science.

The recipient company, Energy Performance Systems, Inc., is based in Minnesota, home to the food cartel companies and their various "grass-roots" fronts that are now gung-ho for "alternative fuels" as a way of inducing farmers and rural residents to accommodate to economic decline and rural impoverishment.

The tree-burning tests involve growing hybrid hardwoods on plantation plots, drying stacks of timber, burning the stacks at 2,400° Fahrenheit, and using the heat for steam turbines to produce electricity. The company's March 2 release states: "The goal is to replace some of the nation's fossil fuel-generated electricity by retrofitting old power plants and building new wood-fired ones. In addition, as the demand for electricity grows and the nation becomes more dependent on producing electricity using renewable resources like wood biomass, the technology will provide farmers with an incentive to raise more fast-growing trees as part of their crop mix on their existing acreage."

The Energy Performance System's line is that the Conservation Re-

serve Program land (crop acreage removed from food production by government action since 1985) should be put into fuel trees, thus "providing farmers with an important new cash crop."

Biomass fuels are touted as environmentally friendly because they are supposedly renewable. However, the energy output is so low-density, and the energy involved in making the apparatus to capture the biomass power is so great, that biomass-produced fuels are a net loss in terms of the real, physical economy, and they are extremely detrimental to the environment.

The only agencies benefitting from the imposition of large-scale biomass fuel production have been commodities cartels looting the environment and whole populations. Brazil, for example, has had severe damage from "gasohol" produced from sugar cane.

Worldwide, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and associated lenders (Citibank, Chase Manhattan, and others) have backed biomass "alternative" fuels in Third World countries as part of their looting schemes. Whole stretches of Africa, India, and South America have been denuded by people forced to burn twigs and trees for cooking and heat, because IMF conditionalities prevented electricity infrastructure development. Now biomass programs are on the agenda for the formerly advanced economy of the U.S.A.

"Whole Tree Energy" is the trademark name of the so-called new technology to be tested in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Energy Performance Systems, Inc., is located in Minneapolis,

Minnesota, also home state of Cargill, Inc., the giant cartel company that gets government subsidies for corn biomass production of ethanol. Another cartel company, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), headed by former Cargill executive Dwayne Andreas, has received billions of dollars to date in tax benefits and subsidies for processing corn, soybeans, and other biomass for ethanol.

The grant for tree biomass "research" covers two areas: designs for how to burn whole, dried trees at a very high temperature to get maximum heat; and secondly, research on hybrid tree plantations.

Earlier this year, test stacks of more than 2,000 tons of trees were started. One pile in Minnesota is 75 feet × 75 feet × 100 feet. Next, these stacks are to be test dried. The largest pile is to have 500 tons of water removed before the combustion process. Finally, the burning tests will be done, to be completed by April.

Under the sponsorship of EPRI, the Department of Energy, and the U.S. Forest Service, Energy Performance Systems, Inc. already manages 11 tree plantations in the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, where tree clones are being grown, some of which are said to grow 10 times as fast as common hardwoods. Other test locations include Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee.

The political bandwagon is rolling for "tree power." The platform of the Minnesota Democratic Farmer Labor Party condemns nuclear and fossil fuel energy and calls for "renewable energy sources." Over June 1-3, a farm belt conference entitled "Energy in Rural America: Profits and Opportunities," is scheduled for Des Moines, Iowa, co-sponsored by grain belt state agencies and the federal government, which will feature "Trees to Energy" seminars.