

Gulf Oil Spill Another Reason to Support Biodiesel

By Lynne Finnerty

Do you run your car on soybeans? You could if it has a diesel engine. Doing so would help make us more energy-independent and would be better for our environment.

We're used to hearing about the "oil crisis"—the limited supply of oil and the billions of dollars sent overseas to buy oil from unstable countries.

Now, the first oil crisis has been overshadowed by what you could call a second oil crisis—the Deepwater Horizon oil spill that is spewing thousands of barrels of oil a day into the Gulf of Mexico. The disaster has taken its place in the record books as the United States' worst oil spill ever.

We need all the energy we can get and oil is a necessary ingredient in the total fuel mix. As much as we all hate to see the situation in the Gulf and the unsuccessful efforts to stop it, none of us is volunteering to give up our cars or, for that matter, eating food, which takes energy to produce.

The public seems to realize this. A recent poll showed that the majority of Americans still support offshore oil drilling.

However, this second oil crisis should bring new urgency to our national efforts to increase the supply of renewable fuels, such as biodiesel made from soybeans.

We've made great strides in the last few years. A \$1-per-gallon federal tax credit has helped biodiesel compete with oil. Since the tax credit was established five years ago, 150 new biodiesel refineries have been built in 44 states and more of us are running our cars on soybeans.

Now those gains are threatened because Congress has been slow to act in renewing the tax credit. It expired at the end of 2009. Since then, between 40 and 50 of the nation's 173 biodiesel plants have shut down.

The National Biodiesel Board has estimated that if the tax credit is renewed, most of those idled plants would come back online and the 8,000 to 11,000 jobs that have been lost since January would be restored immediately.

So, in addition to helping address both the first and second oil crises, you can add economic reasons for supporting biofuels.

The House of Representatives recently passed the American Workers, State, and Business Relief Act of 2010, which would reinstate the biodiesel tax credit. Now, it's the Senate's turn to act. With so many reasons to support biodiesel, the vote for the bill should be a no-brainer.

And here's another reason. With what's happening in the Gulf, you can bet there will be more restrictions on where we can look for oil. So how do we keep our vehicles, our tractors—and our economy—fueled up? The logical solution is producing more renewable fuels like biodiesel, with the tax credit restored to help bring in the investment dollars needed to grow the industry.

Can we count on the Senate to address both of our oil crises, save jobs and keep us on a path to meet more of our energy needs from homegrown fuels? Ask your senator today!