

Alternative Fuel Makes It Easier to be Green

By Mark Wineka in the November 17, 2004, issue of the Salisbury Post

B20 sounds more like a vitamin booster shot than an alternative fuel.

But state and local officials, farmers and environmentalists believe the biodiesel blend will some day bring significant rewards to the economy, people's health, the environment and even homeland security.

A booster shot, if you will, for all of those things.

Salisbury took the first step Tuesday when Superior Oil Co.'s Penn Mart station at 1600 S. Main St put its first B20 biodiesel pump on line. Diesel-powered vehicles from the city of Salisbury immediately lined up for a drink from the new pump.

Salisbury now has the first B20 pump in the "western" part of North Carolina and the fourth in the whole state. The other three pumps are in Durham, Cary and Garner.

The city of Salisbury will redirect its diesel fleet to the pump at Penn Mart and provide the anchor customer Superior Oil needed to make the alternative fuel a viable option.

A \$25,000 grant from the N.C. Alternative Fuel Incentive program also was a key incentive. The money allows Superior Oil Co. to offer the B20 fuel at the same price per gallon as 100 percent petroleum diesel.

On Tuesday, the price at the B20 pump was \$2.139 a gallon, which includes the 48.95 cents a gallon in state and federal taxes.

Biodiesel is a naturally oxygenated (cleaner-burning) fuel produced from soybeans, cooking oil and animal fats, but the focus in North Carolina will definitely be on soybeans.

B20 refers to a blend that is 20 percent biodiesel and 80 percent petroleum diesel. It can be used in any diesel vehicle without modification, though it is particularly recommended for vehicles from the 1993 model year or newer.



Vehicles produced prior to 1993 — if the owners want to use biodiesel fuel — should have rubber seals in fuel pumps and fuel systems replaced with non-rubber seals.

Vernon Sherrill, public services director for the city of Salisbury, said the city will send 50 to 75 of its lighter diesel-powered vehicles to the B20 pump in an initial phase-in period.

Fleet Management Director Ted Phillips said heavy trucks, off-road equipment, buses and packers will be phased in later. Phillips and his staff will take data from those vehicles "and see what kind of adjustments we have to make" during each phase, Sherrill said.

Phillips said the city is going slow, just to be safe. He doesn't anticipate many problems. Biodiesel actually acts as a lubricant and reduces wear and tear on an engine, he noted.

The city's diesel fleet uses about 115,000 gallons of fuel annually. Eventually all of the city's diesel powered equipment, some 200 vehicles, will use the B20 fuel, Sherrill said.

The Public Services Department also is pursuing a \$150,000 grant to test biodiesel fuel with ultra-low sulfur fuel — again in efforts to help the environment, Sherrill said.

Security issue

Larry Shirley, representing the State Energy Of-

rice, said biodiesel fuel fits into homeland security because of the strong dependence now on foreign oil. It helps the economy by helping farmers, and it benefits the environment over regular petroleum diesel because it results in lower emissions, Shirley said.

B20 leads to reductions of 12 percent for carbon monoxide, 20 percent for hydrocarbons, 12 percent for particulates, 20 percent for sulfides and 20 percent for air toxics.

Shirley noted that asthma has become the No. 1 health issue for children in North Carolina.

Shirley, who attended both a ribbon-cutting for the Penn Mart pump and a luncheon later at the Salisbury Elks Lodge, said Tuesday's events were part of an historic day. He commended the leadership Salisbury and Rowan County have shown in addressing air-quality concerns. The community's being in the forefront of biodiesel represents a signal of how it's taking charge, Shirley said.

Dr. John Wear, director of the Catawba College Center for the Environment, praised the Jarrett family of Superior Oil Co. for taking a lead role and said the county will have to see more businesses making this kind of commitment. The Jarretts also received praise at Salisbury City Council's meeting later in the day.

Sherrill said he and Steve Jarrett of Superior Oil first began talking about the city's going to an alternative fuel about a year ago. The city first considered applying for the same \$25,000 grant that eventually went to Superior Oil.

Sherrill said Anne Tazewell, alternative fuels program manager for the N.C. Solar Center, advised him that it would be better for a business — and not just a government entity — to be involved with biodiesel so it could be offered to the public at large.

Tazewell said getting Jarrett to buy into biodiesel was not a hard sell. By far it was the easiest of the four different locations in the state, she said.

Sales increase

The \$25,000 grant through the N.C. Solar Center lasts for a year, but a federal excise tax credit for alternative fuels, which was part of a jobs



bill passed in October, should amount to 20-cents-a-gallon savings and be able to replace the grant, Tazewell said.

One service station owner in the Triangle with a B20 pump has seen his sales increase by 75 percent over the past year, Tazewell added.

Darryl Corriher, a large soybean farmer in Rowan County and a member of the state soybean association and Grain Growers Cooperative Inc., is involved with the cooperative's efforts to build a biodiesel plant in the eastern part of the state.

Not only could biodiesel plants provide local farmers a market for their soybeans, Corriher said, the crop's use as fuel could boost the price for soybeans throughout the state.

"We see a bright future," Corriher said.

Charles Davenport, a board member with the Grain Growers Cooperative, said it's possible that a N.C. plant will be up and running within 12 months. The project has received a \$5 million commitment from the Golden Leaf Foundation, and it also needs a 51 percent equity investment from farmers.

Every farmer is eligible to be a member and share in ownership of the biodiesel plant, Davenport noted. An equity drive in January will offer investment opportunities of \$5,000 to \$250,000. The group envisions a plant with a capacity of 12 to 20 million gallons. ■