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Clemson plans biofuels plant at North Charleston site
Research facility plant expected to produce up to 750,000 gallons annually

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South Carolina took another step Thursday toward reduction of fossil fuel dependence and development of alternative fuel industries when plans were announced for a biofuels pilot plant.

The plant, to be built at the Clemson University Restoration Institute in North Charleston, would use regional plants, such as switchgrass, to make ethanol, said Nick Rigas, director of renewable energy at the Restoration Institute and the South Carolina Institute on Energy Studies.

The plant will produce an estimated 500,000 to 750,000 gallons of fuel annually, he said.

Greenville-based Spinx Corp. will buy and distribute the fuel produced, Rigas said.

Advertisement Rigas made the announcement during a renewable energy conference on switchgrass at Clemson's Pee Dee Research and Education Center in Florence.

"This project will provide our state with unique facilities to scale-up new biofuel technology being developed by the research institutions," Rigas said. "Biofuels produced here will utilize locally available feedstocks that do not compete with food supplies."

Savannah River National Laboratory, Clemson, South Carolina State University and SC Bio have formed the South Carolina Bioenergy Research Collaborative to demonstrate the economic feasibility of using materials such as stems, wood and leaves from regional plants such as switchgrass, trees and sorghum to make ethanol.

The collaborative also includes several industrial partners: Spinx, Fagen Inc., a leader in ethanol plant construction and design, and Dyadic International Inc., a leader in the development of novel enzymes for breaking down cellulose.

Plans are to finalize financing and break ground this summer, and go into operation in mid 2009, Rigas said.

The plant will be housed inside an existing building at the institute and will be a research plant, rather than a commercial operation, working with small amounts of material compared to commercial operations, with a goal of preparing the technology for commercial production

Four or five full-time jobs will be created, and the plant will be a classroom and laboratory for graduate students and visiting researchers.
