Switchgrass: the alternative alternative fuel

By Peter Hull

As the search for alternatives to oil heats up, Clemson agronomist Jim Frederick says the future of biofuels will likely be a combined effort of numerous crops.

Frederick, who studies the science and technology of utilizing plants for food and fuel, among other applications, told more than 200 visitors to the Pee Dee Research and Education Center Fall Field Day that in addition to corn and soybeans, switchgrass has an important role to play.

Switchgrass is a native perennial plant and is one of the most drought-tolerant warm-season grasses. The plant also is high in cellulose and hemicellulose, and relatively low in lignin – which makes for good conversion to ethanol.

Through his research, Frederick plans to develop a profitable switchgrass production system, genetic improvements using biotechnology and traditional breeding, and a projection for profitability of the crop.

For more information: Jim Frederick, 843-662-3526, ext. 228; jfrdrck@clemson.edu or http://agroecology.clemson.edu/switchgrass/sg.htm.