



NEWS RELEASE

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Flux Farm Announces Formation of The Western Colorado Carbon Neutral Bioenergy Consortium

Carbondale, Feb 8, 2010 – Flux Farm Foundation Executive Director Morgan Williams today announced the formation of The Western Colorado Carbon Neutral Bioenergy Consortium (WCCNBC).

“We are happy to announce the creation of a formal partnership between Colorado State University (CSU), Colorado Mountain College (CMC), The City of Rifle, and Flux Farm Foundation,” Williams said. “The Consortium was formed to determine the ability of western Colorado to sustainably produce and process biomass for biofuels and carbon sequestration through applied, inter-disciplinary, scientific investigation.”

While the proliferation of solar technologies in the area has been significant, no studies have comprehensively addressed the opportunities for bioenergy in the region but strong interest remains. “The potential of locally grown and processed biofuels is in keeping with The City of Rifle’s mission to conserve and maintain the environment while diversifying our local economy,” says Charlie Stevens, the City of Rifle’s Utilities director. “The growth of biofeedstocks could eventually represent an opportunity for local farmers and ranchers to diversify their traditional incomes.”

The WCCNBC’s strategy represents a diversion from the business-as-usual approach to bioenergy production that focuses on fertile lands in the midwestern United States. “Much of the current bioenergy paradigm competes for fertile land with food production, while increasing pollution from fertilizers and pesticides, and often resulting in negligible life-cycle greenhouse-gas emissions reductions over conventional fossil fuels,” Williams said. “Our strategy is to target perennial biomass crops that can be grown on marginal agricultural soils with sustainable inputs, and processed in small, regionally located or mobile bioenergy refineries. We are only looking at options that have the potential to result in truly neutral carbon emissions.”

The consortium’s first funded study will look at the capacity of western Colorado to produce low-input perennial bioenergy crops such as switchgrass, orchardgrass, timothy, smooth brome, alfalfa, wheatgrass, ryegrass, tall fescue, and opuntia ‘prickly pear cactus’. “Western Colorado consists of nearly 4.25 million acres of pasture or idled cropland,” says CSU professor Dr. Calvin Pearson. “While high alkaline soils, desert vegetations, heavy soils, variable precipitation, and cold injury are challenges for conventional crops, the opportunity exists to explore how this land resource might lend itself to the low-input growth of native and introduced perennial crops not usually considered for bioenergy production.”

Biomass crops grown during the consortium’s first study will be sent to Colorado Mountain College for conversion to ethanol and butanol representing one of the state’s first bioenergy processing facilities housed at a community college. “In addition to preparing our students to enter today’s energy workforce of oil and gas exploration and development, we are also committed to training tomorrow’s alternative energy workforce,” says CMC Integrative Energy Technology Program Coordinator Jon Prater. “At our campus in Rifle we are currently building demonstration-scale cellulosic ethanol and butanol processing equipment that will allow for the flexible testing of various biomass feedstocks and pretreatment processes.”

Flux Farm Foundation recently received a \$50,000 research grant from the Colorado Department of Agriculture’s ACRE program and \$25,000 in matching funds to initiate biomass growth trials during the spring of 2010 in Carbondale, Rifle, and Fruita, Colorado.

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Flux Farm is a 501.c.3 nonprofit foundation that contributes to the economic viability of agriculture by providing landowners with research driven information on how to profitably integrate renewable energy and carbon sequestration technologies onto farms and ranches in the intermountain west. See www.fluxfarm.com for more information.

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