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"It's a win-win program"

Nebraska Company Introduces Ethanol-Fueled Irrigation System

KEARNEY, NE — August 2008 — AmeriFuels Energy Solutions, a division of Renewable Fuels Technology LLC (RFT), recently introduced a new closed-loop energy system, designed specifically for irrigation applications, that promises to be a win-win situation for everyone involved in agriculture.

According to John Hanson, former district director for Congressman Tom Osborne and partner in RFT, the main component of the AmeriFuel system is a specially designed, ethanol-fueled irrigation engine. In essence, the engine will allow producers to sell corn to a local ethanol plant, buy ethanol back and use it to power their irrigation pumps — currently at a substantial savings in fuel costs over diesel or natural gas powered units.

"We're not just selling the engines," explains Brad Holen, marketing director for AmeriFuels. "We're also in the process of developing the infrastructure for distributing the fuel throughout our market area. So we're really selling a fuel tank and engine, along with a contract for fuel as a package."

Although Holen and others may refer to the product as pure ethanol, government ATF regulations prohibit the sale of ethanol that doesn't have at least two to five percent gasoline in the mixture to limit its use for fuel only. Still, it's as pure as anyone can buy, which means AmeriFuel customers are not reliant on imported oil for their irrigation needs. Since the denatured ethanol burns much cleaner than diesel or natural gas, they're also helping the environment.

"I appreciate the environmental and security issues as much as anyone," says Phil High, who farms near Bertrand, Neb. "But I think the dollar savings will be the real selling point for producers who are continually being hit with rising costs."

As a partner in RFT with Hanson and Arapahoe native John McCoy, president and CEO of Orthman Energy in Lexington, Neb., High has been experimenting with ethanol-powered irrigation engines for the past four years. However, it wasn't until the group hired fuel-injection specialist Fred Page as an RFT consultant that the program really took off.



Although the model is subject to change with availability, AmeriFuels has adopted a General Motors 8.1-liter engine as the current power plant.

Through the use of ethanol and the unique modifications, Page has been able to get fuel consumption down to as little as five gallons per hour.

“With ethanol prices running under \$3 per gallon, that represents a savings of around \$6 to \$8 per hour on the typical Nebraska farm, compared to diesel,” says Phil High, who is now running more than a dozen of the new engines on his own corn and soybean farm. “If you figure an engine runs about 1,000 hours on average during a normal irrigation season, you’re looking at a pretty significant savings.”

High says the fuel-cost savings could be even greater in southwest Kansas, where they have also been testing several engines. Although the wells are deeper in Kansas, High says the ethanol-powered engines tend to act more like a diesel engine in terms of horsepower and torque. Plus, irrigation engines in the southern Great Plains generally operate more frequently and for longer periods of time.

“The part I love about it is we have created this self-sufficient, independent energy loop. It doesn’t matter what happens in the Middle East,” Hanson concludes. “We’ll still have the fuel we need to produce our crops. Besides that, think of the amount of fuel we can save in this country by not having to truck in the diesel for irrigation engines at the same time we’re shipping ethanol out to the cities.”

For more information on RFT or AmeriFuels 8.1 Liter Alternative Energy System, visit their booth during Husker Harvest Days scheduled for September 9-11 in Grand Island, Neb.

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