

# NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: September 8, 2006

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## **Researchers Unveil Biomass Study and New Energy Crop** Oklahoma Universities and Foundation Pave the Way to Biofuel Future

NORMAN, Okla. -- Oklahoma farmers in the very near future may not only be providing food for America's table, but fueling our primary means of transportation. Research, underway in universities and laboratories across Oklahoma, is focused on finding what types of energy crops are best for Oklahoma farmers to grow and which of these crops would yield the most ethanol for alternative fuels. Oklahoma State University (OSU) and the Noble Foundation are just two groups working on ways to fuel the United State's future through energy crops.

Ethanol, produced currently from corn, accounted for approximately 2 percent, or 4 billion gallons, of the United States transportation fuel market in 2005. The U.S. Department of Energy outlined in the recently released Billion Ton Study, that by the year 2030, 30 percent of the current U.S. petroleum consumption will be displaced by ethanol. With the expectation that 60 billion gallons of ethanol will be produced in the U.S. within the next two decades, it is clear that corn-based ethanol cannot alone meet the need.

Use of dedicated energy crops for ethanol production is on the near-term horizon. With the development of dedicated energy crops and advancements in biorefining technology, crops such as switchgrass, which is native to Oklahoma, could help to meet the U.S. ethanol production goal. Switchgrass is a preferred energy feedstock because it is viable on less productive cropland, it produces more energy per unit of input than corn and it does not have to compete with human food and animal feed markets.

"The Billion Ton study has been the jumping off point for research conducted by OSU on Oklahoma dedicated energy feedstocks," said Ray Huhnke, P.E., Professor in Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering at OSU. "Our team will be announcing at the Oklahoma Governor's

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## **“Researchers Uncover Biomass Study and New Energy Crop” – ADD ONE**

Conference on Biofuels, the preliminary baseline data from our research which will identify county by county what energy crops have the best potential for the differing types of Oklahoma agricultural environments. This information in turn can identify what type and where biorefineries should be located in Oklahoma.”

While still in the research phase, biorefineries will convert the cellulose found in plants into ethanol.

Farmers’ and ranchers’ commitment to grow energy crops and the development of cellulosic ethanol refineries are interdependent. The OSU study will not only offer strategic information for the technology side of biorefining, it will allow Oklahoma agricultural producers the most scientific data available to make sound decisions on what types of viable energy crops to grow.

The Noble Foundation has a long history of enhancing agriculture through plant improvement and working with regional agricultural producers to support their farm and ranch operations. Leveraging its expertise in improving grasses and forage legumes, the Noble Foundation is developing advanced, dedicated energy crops to benefit the emerging biofuels industry in Oklahoma and elsewhere.

“The initial focus of Noble’s research is to improve the yield per acre-potential of these crops,” said Dr. Joe Bouton, director of Noble’s Forage Improvement Division. “Yield is the critical factor in achieving economic sustainability and returning income to the agricultural producer.”

Noble’s research is currently using conventional plant breeding to “domesticate” switchgrass and make significant performance improvements. Long-term plans will involve creating hybrid switchgrass and using plant biotechnologies to add new traits that will affect its adaptability to new regions of the United States and increase its production capability.

“We are excited about the possibilities of switchgrass and other energy crops,” said Dr. Bouton. “Agriculture’s contribution to U.S. energy security will have a dramatic impact on domestic agriculture and rural economies.”

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## “Researchers Uncover Biomass Study and New Energy Crop” – ADD TWO

The Noble Foundation, in cooperation with Ceres, Inc., plans to commercially release its first elite switchgrass variety in the spring of 2009.

OSU and the Noble Foundation will be among the national, regional and local presenters at **Grow: The Oklahoma Governor’s Conference on Biofuels October 3-4, 2006 at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.** The conference will address the fusion of agriculture, biotechnology and the energy industries and what this means for Oklahoma’s future *from farmland to fuel tank*. Attendees will be updated on the latest news and developments in the biofuel industry:

- The Oklahoma Biofuels Initiative
- Report on the ongoing Oklahoma biomass resource study
- Noble Foundation’s development of a dedicated energy crop
- Biorefinery construction in Oklahoma
- Federal and state initiatives for biomass and biofuel production
- Petroleum and automotive industries’ commitment to alternative fuels
- Impacts and opportunities for fleet managers, end users and marketers
- Advances in feedstock conversion technology

Registration is \$20. For more information or registration, visit [www.GrowOK.com](http://www.GrowOK.com) or call 1-800-203-5494. The Oklahoma Governor’s Conference on Biofuels is presented by the Office of the Secretary of Energy, State of Oklahoma, in collaboration with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture and the Office of the Secretary of Environment, State of Oklahoma.

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**Editor’s note:** For more information, to attend the conference or to receive additional media materials, please call Anglin Public Relations at (405) 840-4222. **Materials available include:** conference logo, photos of speakers, a map of research and biorefinery locations across Oklahoma, a graphic depicting the biofuel process and how researchers, farmers, biorefineries and gas stations are interrelated, and (after the conference) presentation summaries and links to podcasts/webcasts of the presentations. Most of these materials will be available in high resolution format on the conference web site at [www.growOK.com](http://www.growOK.com) Call Anglin Public Relations to discuss how your publication can receive same day reports and photos from the conference.