

FEATURE – USDA STUDIES BETTER PLANTS FOR ETHANOL PRODUCTION

INTRO: USDA researchers are studying how to increase the number of leaves on certain plants in hopes of making fuel from those leaves. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more from Albany, California. (1:31)

CELLULOSIC ETHANOL IS PRODUCED FROM BIOMASS SUCH AS THE LEAVES ON THIS CORN PLANT. U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE RESEARCHERS IN ALBANY, CALIFORNIA ARE TRYING TO FIND WAYS TO MAKE PLANTS PRODUCE MORE AND BIGGER LEAVES THAT ARE EASIER TO BREAK DOWN AND TURN INTO ETHANOL.

Sarah Hake, Center Director, USDA ARS Plant Gene Expression Center: If you had a plant that made much bigger leaves, you would be getting more material to start with. The goal for many researchers right now is to steer the focus from the food that can be eaten to the parts of the plant that aren't eaten and really focusing on getting energy out of the leaves and out of the stems.

HAKE AND FELLOW U-S-D-A AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE SCIENTISTS ARE LOOKING FOR GENETIC DIFFERENCES THAT CAN BE USED TO PRODUCE LEAFIER PLANTS.

Sarah Hake, Center Director, USDA ARS Plant Gene Expression Center: And the kinds of leaf mutants that we are studying are hoping to give us clues as to how the leaf is put together with the goal of then breaking it down in terms of making lignose cellulosic energy. So that's sort of the long range goal of the research is to look at leaf mutants is to find a way to see how the leaves are put together so we can know how to take them apart and get the energy out of the leaves.

HAKE SAYS SHE HOPES THAT THE GENETICALLY ALTERED PLANTS CAN SOMEDAY BE REPRODUCED ON A LARGE SCALE.

Sarah Hake, Center Director, USDA ARS Plant Gene Expression Center: All crops are a result of genetic changes that have been selected by humans. And so whenever we look at a crop and we look at its ancestor they are very different.

I'M BOB ELLISON FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN ALBANY, CALIFORNIA.