

# AGWEEK

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## Nebraska leads on biofuels

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska will continue to be a national leader in development of biofuels.

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska will continue to be a national leader in development of biofuels.

That's the core of the recent announcement that one of five national biofuels research centers will be located at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The announcement deserves to be celebrated.

The next phase of ethanol production, known as cellulosic ethanol, will move beyond use of corn to use of other plant material, perhaps cornstalks or from plants such as switchgrass.

The Lincoln (Neb.) Journal Star's editorial board has expressed the worry from time to time that Nebraska would be left behind in the next phase, even though it currently ranks second in the country in production of ethanol from corn.

### Five-center investment

The \$10 million for the five centers across the country will be included in the agricultural appropriations bill.

Though approval is not absolutely assured, Congress is expected to approve the bill before the end of the year, according to Nebraska Democratic Sen. Ben Nelson, who played a key role in ensuring that the funding came through for the university.

"We're already America's breadbasket," Nelson says. "Thanks to projects like this, we're also becoming America's gas tank."

### History of research

There's little doubt that a key reason why the center is headed for Nebraska is because of ongoing research that stretches back for more than 30 years.

Ken Vogel, who serves as research leader of the 20-member Grain, Forage and Bioenergy Research Unit at UNL, was one of the lead scientists who wrote a National Academy of Sciences paper on the results of a five-year study on the energy potential of switchgrass, which requires less water to grow than corn, can be grown on marginal land and provides habitat for wildlife.

Nebraska also is home to a pilot plant for ethanol production, located at the Abengoa corn ethanol plant in York.

Researchers there are working to make production of cellulosic ethanol commercially viable.

### Financial backing

Also important to Nebraska's future participation in the development of cellulosic ethanol production is USDA's announcement that funding will be available for farmers to grow nonfood crops that can be turned into fuel.

Farmers who sign up for the program may receive payments for up to 75 percent of the cost of establishing eligible crops, according to Nelson's office. Sioux Falls, S.D.-based Poet L.L.C. plans to seek approval to use these biomass crops at its cellulosic refinery in Scotland, S.D., just across the Nebraska border.

Researchers have been touting the energy potential of cellulosic ethanol for years.

With commercial production nearing, it's exciting that Nebraska now is assured a significant role in the move toward renewable fuels.

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