

National Algae Association Issues Comments to “Advancements in Algal Biofuels: Year in Review”

Source: national algae association

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Trust but verify - the slogan used during the Cold War to describe the basis for transparency in political relationships. Today, the term can be used to describe a way to narrow the “trust gap” between government agencies and the American public.

HOUSTON -- The Department of Energy’s Bioenergy Technologies Office recently released “[Advancements in Algal Biofuels: Year in Review](#).” While the advancements might be news in Washington, none of them are newsworthy to the algae production industry. Below are excerpts from the document, along with NAA’s comments.

Fast algae-to-bio-crude oil process reduces production costs. DOE’s Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) is receiving national recognition for developing a process to turn algae into bio-crude oil in just minutes.

Comment: This is not new news. Hydrothermal liquefaction is another name for a process that has been used in petroleum refining for more than 100 years.

Discovery in algae cell biology overcomes key challenge to algal biofuels – Researchers at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography (SIO) made a significant breakthrough in the metabolic engineering of algae to improve yield of lipids (the energy-storing fat molecules that can be used in biofuel production). The high lipid yields that result from utilizing their method can potentially improve the economics of algal biofuel production.

Comment: the key phrase is CAN POTENTIALLY. A lot of things can potentially happen.

Collaborative outdoor algae production testing facilities come online: Two national algae R&D testbed programs kicked off their project work in 2013. The Arizona State University-led Algae Testbed Public-Private Partnership (ATP3) and the University of Arizona Regional Algae Feedstock Testbed Partnership manage algal biofuel R&D facilities across the United States and serve as engines for algal technology innovation and validation, job training and workforce development, and long-term cultivation data.

COMMENT: NAA has not been able to independently verify the status of any of the facilities. NAA has, however, created its own online Algae Production Certification Course and its second algae production incubator facility is operational.

Biorefiners partner with BETO-supported companies to move algae oil production toward commercial scale - Sapphire Energy, one of the world’s leaders in algae-based green crude oil production, entered into contract agreements with two major oil and gas companies. Both Sapphire Energy and Cellana expect to produce algae oil on a commercial scale in 2015.

BETO-supported industrial biotechnology company exceeds algae biofuel production target – Algenol began operating its pilot-scale integrated biorefinery, which demonstrates the commercial viability of its two-step fuel production technology..Algenol expects to be operating at full commercial scale by the end of

2014.

COMMENT: "Both Sapphire Energy and Cellana EXPECT TO produce algae on a commercial scale in 2015" and Algenol EXPECTS to be operating at full commercial scale by the end of 2014. Expectations are the same as potentials. The Cellana/Neste Oil Agreement is 'contingent on Cellana's future production capacity and on compliance with future biofuel legislation in the EU and US, among other factors.' **IT'S CONTINGENT ON PRODUCTION.**

- *New awards announced for integrated R&D on algal biology and downstream processing* – During BETO's Biomass 2013 Conference, Energy Secretary Moniz announced up to \$16.5 million in algae competitive award selections. Hawaii Bioenergy, Sapphire Energy, New Mexico State University, and California Polytechnic State University all received funding to demonstrate algal biofuel intermediate yields of greater than 2,500 gallons per acre by 2018.

COMMENT: A lot can and will happen in the next 4 years.

- *New award announced for low-cost algae production* – BioProcess Algae LLC, a joint venture focused on commercializing algae production, was also awarded \$6.5 million to grow low-cost algae using renewable carbon dioxide (CO₂)—provided by a co-located ethanol plant—and produce hydrocarbon fuels that meet military specifications, animal feed, glycerine, and other hydrocarbon products.

COMMENT: NAA has been unable to verify any information.

While producing commercially relevant quantities of algae-based biofuels may seem to belong to the distant future, each year brings the United States closer to realizing that goal, as well as the energy security, American jobs, and CO₂ reductions that accompany it.

COMMENT: Algae-based biofuels don't belong to the distant future in other countries. Other countries are using the 60+ years of algae research we have invested in, and existing (sometimes off the shelf) technologies, and doing today what some group in Washington thinks is in the distant future. The American public has been led to believe that we are years away from commercial algae production, and has led us to believe that the infrastructure created in Washington will make the US the leader in commercial algae production.

'In June, 2010, the DoE awarded the National Alliance for Advanced Biofuels and Bioproducts (NAABB) \$44 million, under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, to develop a systems approach for sustainable commercialization of algal biofuel (such as renewable gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel) and bioproducts.' The Committee for its next annual meeting consists of employees at U.S. research facilities and at universities. With that in mind, it is not surprising that the words 'commercial production' do not appear anywhere on its agenda.

The mantra for any emerging industry must be "trust but verify. And if you can't verify, don't waste your time and just walk away from technologies that cannot be proven to work outside the lab." Americans are by nature forgiving people. Most will forgive a failure if they believe an indisputable effort was made to achieve success. What Americans should not be expected to forgive is failure based on ill-aligned and misguided priorities, bestowing tasks on people who are not competent or qualified to see them through, and failures based on information that could and should have verified before the damage was done.

We have heard several suggestions for the renaming of the Department of Energy but, based on these alleged 'advancements' this one caught our eye: "Department of Expectations"

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