

Florida's Energy Future: Orange Peels to Ethanol

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Oranges may be a new frontier in America's defense against terrorism. America's energy policy has made us highly dependent of foreign oil. Integral to protecting our country from terrorism is implementing an energy policy that reduces our dependence on foreign oil and makes a commitment to domestically-produced renewable fuels. This challenge presents an extraordinary opportunity right here in our own backyard for Florida to become the leader in a new industry that converts orange pulp and peels and other natural products into ethanol fuel.

I recently joined Agriculture Commissioner Charlie Bronson and Florida Power & Light Energy in announcing a new plan to locate the first-ever commercial scale plant to turn citrus peel into ethanol right here in Florida. Another company recently received a grant from the Dept of Energy to build the state's first gasification cellulosic ethanol plant that can make fuel from a variety of natural waste products and locate it in LaBelle.

FPL estimates that converting citrus pulp and peel to ethanol could produce over 60 million gallons of fuel per year. This new renewable energy industry would be vital to our country's energy needs and would offer our community the opportunity to participate in a cutting edge industry of the future.

A commitment at the federal level to renewable energy production combined with the initiatives of Commissioner Bronson and the support of the Florida Legislature shows that momentum is building. The Florida State Legislature recently adopted a resolution in support of the national 25 by 25 initiative to have America's farms, ranches and forests provide 25 percent of America's energy needs from renewable sources by the year 2025 and established a "Farm to Fuel" grants program.

Recent efforts in Congress have echoed Florida's commitment to increasing the production and use of renewable fuels. As the only Florida member of the House Committee on Agriculture, I was proud to lead efforts to secure a commitment in the 2007 Farm Bill to jumpstart Florida's citrus-ethanol industry, by including over \$2 billion for research and development of technologies to produce ethanol from citrus peels and other waste products, allowing citrus growers and other farmers to have access to federal programs supporting ethanol production, and providing incentives for investment in this new industry.

The potential for Florida is great. Our children deserve the opportunity to participate in an industry of the future right here at home. Developing our renewable energy industry could especially help students in places like Hendry County, where nearly 30 percent of students do not graduate from high school within five years.

With the right vision and commitment, Florida could become the "silicon valley" of renewable energy production. I will continue to work with Governor Crist, Commissioner Bronson and my colleagues in Congress to make this vision a reality.

Congressman Tim Mahoney

Florida's 16th Congressional District