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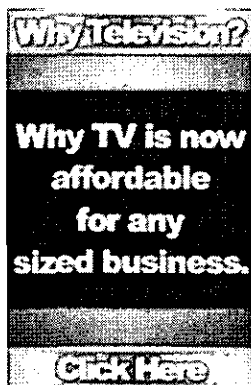
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Keeping up with ethanol production

By Rajah Maples

Posted: Wednesday, January 17, 2007 at 5:13 PM



Farmers throughout the area seem excited about the idea of several ethanol plants going in the Tri-States. But whether farmers can keep up with the demand is another question.

There are ethanol plants either currently in operation or under development in Burlington, Iowa, and Macon and Laddonia in northeast Missouri. Plants have been announced or a under construction in Monroe City, Quincy and Griggsville. Investors are considering two more ethanol plants in Adams County. If all these are built, that would mean nine ethanol plants within a 150-mile radius.

So can Tri-State farmers grow enough corn to supply these ethanol plants? Mike Roegge with the University of Illinois Extension Office says there's no way.

According to Gulfstream Bioflex Energy, the company bringing the ethanol plant to Monroe City, it takes 35 million bushels of corn to make 100 million gallons of ethanol. The proposed ethanol plant in Monroe City is expected to produce 100 million gallons of ethanol a year; the plants in Macon and Laddonia produce 50 million gallons a year each. So total production at those three plants would be 200 million gallons of ethanol; that would take million bushels of corn to produce.

But here's the problem. Farmers in northeast Missouri only produced 34 million bushels of corn in 2005. West Central Illinois would have a similar problem if all of the proposed ethanol plants become reality.

Here's another concern. Mike Roegge told us that a USDA report just this past Friday showed that the nation had less than a month's supply of corn at the end of 2006. He says the country needs far more than that in case of drought or a major disaster, and more ethanol plants will only mean more demand and less supply. That higher demand and lower supply will likely higher corn prices, and that could be passed on to you at the supermarket.

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