



Farmer Participation Key To Creating Agricultural Biomass Markets

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In a study commissioned by the United States Department of Agriculture, it was estimated that the US could produce one billion tons of biomass to replace 30% of our annual consumption of petroleum. A large amount of forestry biomass is already used for heat, steam, and electric power in many facilities throughout the United States. The report found that agricultural biomass is under-utilized and could provide over 700 million tons of material annually to meet the 1 billion ton goal. The USDA study assumed that all biomass would be harvested and sold to fill the needs for biomass.

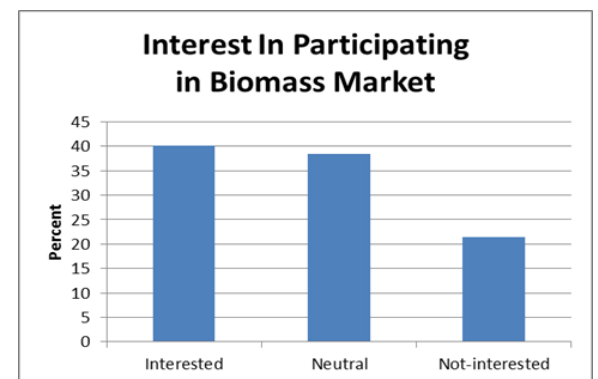
While there are questions about whether the agricultural landscape and other logistical factors can support harvesting that volume of biomass, a key question is whether farmers are interested in supplying this biomass. Farmers are in the important position of deciding whether they want to use their time, energy, and fields to produce biomass. Without farmer support, biomass will not be a viable market for agriculture.

Studies in other states have examined farmer interest in participating in biomass markets. They found that the interest varied regionally and that farmers in some areas had significantly higher interest in selling biomass than others. Because of the interest in biomass energy in Minnesota, we felt it was important to identify whether farmers in this region wanted to sell biomass from their lands. In April of this year, the West Central Research and Outreach Center sent out surveys to farmers throughout Minnesota asking them about their intentions of selling biomass should there be a market for it. The study, conducted with support from the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute and The Minnesota Corn Growers, also looked at what factors would influence their decisions to be part of the biomass market place.

Early results are indicating that interest in participating varies considerably, between being very interested and not at all interested. Statewide, around 40% responded that they were interested in selling biomass versus roughly 20% indicating they were not interested. In written comments, some of those interested in selling biomass mentioned the opportunity for extra income. Those not interested often wrote that removal of nutrients and organic matter was the factor that most concerned them.

As with other studies, there did appear to be a difference between regions of the state. Those in the northwest were more interested in the possibility of selling biomass than those in the southeast.

Currently, we are using statistics to more fully analyze the data. A number of additional questions were asked to help identify the types and quantities of biomass farmers might have available. We are also



interested in what additional information farmers feel they need to make a decision whether or not to participate in biomass markets. We can then target our outreach and education efforts towards those areas. A more complete picture should be available when the research is finished this fall.

Youth Healthy Cooking Challenge

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Healthy living is the core of 4-H and remains a foundation of the 4-H pledge. Although 4-H believes that healthy living habits begin in the context of families, the program strives to equip youth with healthy living knowledge and skills that will prepare them physically, emotionally and socially to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Recently President Obama urged all Americans to promote healthy living for our children during a proclamation of September as National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. The MN 4-H Healthy Living program embraces the role of providing healthy living opportunities for youth and conducted a new activity at the MN State Fair.

The State Fair 4-H Healthy Living Skill-a-thon and Cook-off, modeled after such competitions as the Food Network's "Chopped", challenged youth to create a dish using only a clue, predetermined ingredients and a common pantry. Youth polished up their skills with professional chefs during skill-a-thons and then in small teams used their food and nutrition knowledge, creativity and leadership skills to prepare a dish and put together a presentation for the judges and observers. All cooking supplies and basic ingredients were provided with financial support from MN 4-H Foundation United Healthcare and National 4-H Council Wal-Mart grants.

Eighty-one 4-H members participated in the cook-offs held one per general encampment. Fifty-six percent of the participants had never participated in a public cook-off type event before. Forty percent reported they had never made a stir fry before. When asked to list "any activities that you did that you plan to do again", 64% said they plan to cook again, 54% plan to make stir fry again, and 17% plan to use herbs in their cooking. Twenty-eight percent of the participants listed

that they plan to participant in a public cook-off again. Some of the participants' comments were:

- *I am planning to make stir fry for my family for supper, I learned how to mix things together that taste good.*
- *chopping vegetables. I learned that cooking is a fun thing to do daily!*
- *make up my own meal I learned how to balance out your flavors.*

Since 1989, Minnesota's percentage of obese population has increased by two and a half times. (Van Hecke 2010) Challenging family schedules often accompanied by limited cooking skills play a role in increased obesity rates.

The major goal of the MN 4-H Healthy Living program is to foster lifelong skills and habits that promote healthy living by providing opportunities for engagement in physical activity and adventure while integrating

good nutrition and improving healthy food choices/ decision making. For more information about the MN 4-H Healthy Living program, check out our Facebook page @ <http://www.facebook.com/MN4HHealthyLiving?ref=hl> or contact Carrie Olson, Extension Educator, at olson166@umn.edu. Van Hecke, J. (2010). The Burdensome Weight of Obesity Studies. *MN2020 Hindsight Blog*. Retrieved from <http://mn2020hindsight.org/view/the-burdensome-weight-of-obesity-studies>

