



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA Explores Feasibility of Alternative Energy Production at Airports

WASHINGTON, March 29, 2012--A recent study conducted by researchers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) highlights the potential for alternative energy production at airports. The study findings were published in an article titled "[Airports Offer Unrealized Potential for Alternative Energy Production](#)" in *Environmental Management* and indicates that airports may want to consider converting to alternative fuels where it is both economically and environmentally beneficial.

"Some available grasslands at airports have the potential to spur the type of innovation we need to build American-made, homegrown biofuels and biobased products that will help to break our dependence on foreign oil and move our nation toward a clean energy economy," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "Converting airport grasslands to biofuel, solar or wind production not only provides more environmentally-sound alternative energy sources for our country, but may also increase revenue for airports and reduce the local abundance of potentially hazardous wildlife to aircraft. Such efforts may be particularly beneficial for rural economic development, as many rural airport properties contain expansive grasslands that potentially could be converted to biofuel crops or other renewable energy sources."

While federally obligated airports have restrictions on how land may be used, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is committed to working with airports interested in pursuing the potential for changes in land use to support alternative energy production.

Researchers at the USDA-APHIS National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) note that many airport properties are already managed to reduce wildlife abundance and habitat quality as part of efforts to avoid wildlife collisions with aircraft. Once biofuel crops are identified for airport use that have low wildlife-strike risks compared to existing airport landcovers, converting grasslands to these land uses could produce renewable energy and also provide airports with an additional source of revenue.

Ongoing and future NWRC research hopes to identify renewable energy practices, including specific types of biofuel crops, which limit use by wildlife hazardous to aircraft and are

compatible with safe airport operations. NWRC researchers and collaborators are currently studying wildlife use of solar arrays and adjacent airport grasslands in Arizona, Colorado and Ohio, as well as wildlife use of experimental plots containing switchgrass and mixed warm-season native grasses in Mississippi. Researchers note the economic profitability of biofuel, solar or wind production will vary markedly, but will depend primarily on yield, establishment and maintenance costs, opportunity costs of land (i.e., land rental or revenue from other commodities), and processing or utilization costs. For many airports where land is currently available, the benefits may outweigh the costs. For related photos, please see <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/sets/72157629261940922/>.

The USDA-APHIS National Wildlife Research Center is the research arm of the wildlife services (WS) program. NWRC's field station in Sandusky, Ohio, is dedicated to providing a scientific foundation for WS and FAA programs that reduce wildlife collisions with aircraft. NWRC research is focused on understanding the nature of wildlife hazards on and near airports, developing management tools to reduce those hazards, and providing WS, airport personnel, and the FAA with information on the latest strategies for controlling wildlife hazards.

For additional information concerning wildlife and aviation research, please visit www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/nwrc/research/aviation or contact the NWRC Ohio field station at (419) 625-0242.

The Obama Administration, with Agriculture Secretary Vilsack's leadership, has worked tirelessly to strengthen rural America, implement the Farm Bill, maintain a strong farm safety net, and create opportunities for America's farmers and ranchers. U.S. agriculture is currently experiencing one of its best years in decades thanks to the productivity and resourcefulness of our producers. Each day, APHIS works hard to safeguard our nation's agriculture, fishing and forestry industries from unwanted pests, disease and unjustified restrictions.

To create jobs in rural communities, drive economic growth, and help reduce our dependence on foreign oil, USDA is aggressively pursuing investments in renewable energy, investing in or making payments to over 5,700 renewable energy and energy efficiency improvement projects. More than 130 biodiesel and ethanol projects funded by USDA are currently producing almost 3.7 billion gallons of biodiesel and ethanol annually, enough fuel – in equivalence to gasoline – to keep five million vehicles on the road every year. In addition, USDA provided financial assistance for blender fuel pumps so drivers can pump fuels with higher ethanol mix into their gas tanks. This year, these programs provided financial assistance to help support nearly 250 blender fuel pumps.

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