

A BARTOW COUNTY AGRICULTURE BUSINESS IS PARTICIPATING IN A DIESEL TEST THAT COULD HELP IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT



Sod Atlanta, a local sod farm with locations in Taylorsville and on Ga. Highway 113 in Cartersville, was chosen as one of the farms in Georgia to use biodiesel fuel in its tractors as part of a study to find cleaner, more environmentally friendly fuel alternatives.

Ken Morrow, president and general manager of Sod Atlanta, said he was happy to participate in the study that uses biodiesel derived from soy oil.

"We've been reading about biodiesel as an alternative fuel source for two or three years," Morrow said. "It's a completely renewable energy source that gives a boost to the local economy by helping soybean farmers and keeps money at home."

Morrow was asked by the director of the Georgia-Florida Soybean Association to participate in the test, that is being used at both traditional and nontraditional agriculture sites. The sod farm is considered nontraditional agriculture.

For years, the government has tested the efficiency of biodiesel, a cleaner burning fuel alternative that is mixed with any type of fat or vegetable oil. Because these two oils contain no petroleum, they can be mixed with petroleum diesel to make a blend. Because it burns cleaner, fewer toxins are introduced into the environment, according to National Biodiesel board's Web site, www.biodiesel.org.

Biodiesel can be used in any type of diesel engine, and it is biodegradable, nontoxic and does not have the strong odors regular diesel fuel often emits.

"When you're operating a tractor that's running off biodiesel, the smoke doesn't irritate your eyes and sinuses as much as diesel fuel. That's a big plus," Morrow said, describing the smoke as almost sweet smelling.

So far during the test, Sod Atlanta employees see no difference between biodiesel and regular diesel, said Brandon Chambley, manager of the Sod Atlanta's Taylorsville location.

"The performance has been at least equal. We don't know yet if it will have dramatic differences [on the sod farm]," Chambley said.

Morrow, who is co-chair of the agribusiness committee of the Bartow County Environmental Management Program, recently was named to the state Environmental Advisory Council by Gov. Sonny Perdue. Morrow said he hopes more agricultural industries will one day use biodiesel.

On average, biodiesel costs about 2 cents more per gallon than diesel fuel. For the study, three drums of biodiesel were shipped to Sod Atlanta to be manually mixed with regular diesel. For large-scale use, it can be purchased from oil suppliers.

"We started the biodiesel tests last week, and it's a three-week program, and we're hoping to be involved in a second experimental phase," Morrow said. "We're already considering evaluating the economics of suppliers because we're considering using this on a full-time basis."

While researching biodiesel, Chambley said he read reports that Indiana used biodiesel in all of its state-owned vehicles. He figures that if an entire state ran the product and it produced positive results, agricultural businesses can also use biodiesel successfully, he said.

Although the product is a little more expensive, Morrow said it provides an environmental peace-of-mind.

"We won't mind paying that kind of difference to reduce the use of foreign fuel dependency and support America's agriculture," he said.

Sod Atlanta was formed in 1985, and it produces a variety of grasses for both urban landscapes and sports fields, including Bermuda, zoysia, centipede and fescue grasses.