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FIU and Florida Crystals to develop ethanol technology

MIAMI (February 22, 2007)— Florida International University and Florida Crystals Corporation will receive $1M for ethanol research.

Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp announced today the Florida Department of Environmental Protection will award FIU's Applied Research Center (ARC) and Florida Crystals Corporation (FCC) a $1M grant to develop cellulosic ethanol technology under the Florida Renewable Energy Technologies Grant Program. The grant, the product of a unique partnership between FIU-ARC and FCC, will identify a pretreatment process that can cost-effectively convert sugarcane bagasse to ethanol. The study will determine the feasibility of using Florida bagasse as a feedstock for a future large-scale bioenergy plant in Florida. The grant will be matched by FCC, the largest sugar producer in the United States.

"This public-private partnership is an important first step in developing alternative fuel sources in Florida," said Harlan Sands, Executive Director of FIU-ARC. "Improving the biomass to ethanol process is critical." Corn is currently the feedstock for ethanol in the U.S., but experts have forecasted corn can only supply 10% of future U.S. gasoline demand. While biomass is more abundant and cheaper than corn, the technology to break it down into fermentable sugars is lacking.

"We are enthusiastic about engaging in this collaborative project with FIU," said Alfonso Fanjul, Chairman and CEO of FCC. "Our investment in ethanol research and technology will further our commitment to improving and expanding our eco-friendly, renewable energy program."

Bagasse is a plentiful Florida by-product of sugar extraction from sugarcane. More than one million tons are annually produced by the Florida sugar industry. FCC already mixes their bagasse with urban wood waste to fuel their Biomass Renewable Energy Facility, the largest in the U.S.

"We hope this effort with FIU will enable us to develop cellulosic ethanol from our sugar cane that will reduce our dependence on foreign oil," said J. Pepe Fanjul, COO and President of FCC.

Although bagasse is a valuable fuel, there is strong commercial interest in upgrading its value by converting it to ethanol. Demand for ethanol is driven by the President's call to boost annual ethanol and other alternative fuel production to 35 billion gallons by 2017 and reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil.

FIU and FCC will investigate promising pretreatment processes for bagasse conversion to sugars that can be readily fermented to ethanol and will scale up those findings to a pilot facility to assess the feasibility of commercialization of the bagasse-to-ethanol technology.

"We are determined to make Florida a front runner in cellulosic ethanol production using local biomass, attracting investment, and creating well-paying jobs in our State," said Dr. George Philippidis, FIU-ARC's Associate Director and Principal Investigator and an expert in the cellulosic ethanol business.

The project's aim of catalyzing the commercialization of ethanol production from biomass will constitute the first case where a major commercial company (FCC) and a leading technology development institute (FIU) are jointly performing pilot development to take cellulosic ethanol to full commercial scale.

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