

Iowa State engineer to tell Senate committee to think beyond ethanol from corn

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Robert C. Brown is studying how biorenewable resources such as switchgrass can be converted to fuels and chemicals. Photo by Jim Heemstra

Iowa State's Robert C. Brown will tell a U.S. Senate committee on Wednesday, April 26, that corn and soybeans won't be able to produce enough renewable fuels to significantly reduce the country's oil imports.

Making ethanol from corn shouldn't be the ultimate goal of the country's renewable fuels industry, Robert C. Brown will tell a U.S. Senate committee next week.

Brown, Iowa State's Bergles Professor in Thermal Science and the director of Iowa State's Office of Biorenewables Programs, has been invited to testify before the Senate's Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. Brown's testimony will be part of a committee

hearing on the state of the biofuels industry.

The hearing will be 10 a.m. Wednesday, April 26, in Room SR-328A of the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.

Brown said he'll tell senators that corn and soybeans alone won't be able to produce enough renewable fuels to displace a significant fraction of imported petroleum. That will require development of new technologies able to convert switchgrass, corn stalks and other fibrous plant material into fuels and chemicals.

An acre of switchgrass could produce almost twice as much fuel as an acre of corn, Brown said. And an acre of switchgrass with its high yield of biomass could produce as much protein as an acre of soybeans.

"We need to understand that converting corn to ethanol is not the goal," Brown said. "It is a pathway, and possibly a transitory one, to the larger goals of reduced dependence on imported petroleum and improved environmental quality."

Source: Iowa State University of Science and Technology

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