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GREATER BATON ROUGE BusinessReport

White Castle biomass plant on schedule to begin turning sugar cane waste into fuel in July

RYAN BROUSSARD
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The biorefinery being installed by NFR BioEnergy at a White Castle sugar mill, which will turn sugar cane waste into biomass pellets that can be burned in coal-fired plants, is on schedule to begin production in July, the company's co-founder told those gathered at a conference hosted by the LSU AgCenter on Wednesday in conjunction with National Bioenergy Day.

Once operational, the biorefinery will be capable of processing about 200 metric tons of cane waste, or bagasse, annually, said Rick Buhr. For every three tons of bagasse processed, about one ton of pellets are produced.

The bagasse pellets are similar to coal, Buhr said, except they do not contain the harmful gases that coal emits when burned. He envisions scenarios in which coal-fired plants that might otherwise be forced to close because of environmental regulations can remain open using NFR's bagasse pellets.

"I think our product presents an alternative to switching over to natural gas or putting in very costly—tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars—of equipment to save those power plants by just co-firing our material because our material co-fires readily with no retrofitting of current infrastructure," he said.

Buhr also foresees exporting the biomass to Europe where there is a high demand for bioenergy.

"We have very hungry customers over there," Buhr said.

The biorefinery being installed at the Cora Texas Sugar Mill plant in White Castle is the first of 10 that NFR is planning to install at sugar mills across south Louisiana, at a total cost of about \$312 million. When



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the investment was announced by company and state officials last August, [Louisiana Economic Development](#) estimated the projects would create 450 new direct jobs by 2019.

Louisiana is an ideal location for NFR’s biorefineries, Buhr said, because the state harvests about 13 million tons of cane each year—and about 35% of the take is trash that can be turned into biomass pellets.

“They get to experience the efficiencies of clean cane and we get a boatload of bagasse,” Buhr told the crowd of scientists, engineers and other bioenergy professionals of the mutually beneficial relationship between NFR and the sugar mills.

Although sugarcane is only harvested for about 100 days in Louisiana each year, Buhr said its plants will stay busy year-round because it will store bagasse equal to three years worth of harvests.

“As far as secure supply, unless the sugar market completely craps out, we have long-term contracts with mills to provide this bagasse,” Buhr said.

—Ryan Broussard

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