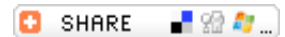


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Nation

Sen. Udall tours solar-powered biofuels facility

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BROOMFIELD, COLO. — A Colorado facility that uses solar power to convert plant material into transportation fuel is another example of how the country can foster both energy independence and jobs, said U.S. Sen. Mark Udall.

The Democrat toured the Sundrop Fuels Inc. demonstration plant in the north-Denver suburb of Broomfield on Tuesday. The site is believed to be the only facility that uses the sun's energy to produce gas from plant material.

Officials with the Louisville-based business are seeking Udall's support for legislation extending tax credits to renewable-fuels technology. Sundrop Fuels Chief Executive Wayne Simmons said he would like to see Congress invest in renewable fuels as it has in wind and solar power to generate electricity.

"I'm very supportive of that concept," Udall said in a phone interview.

Much of the focus has been on the energy sources used to produce electricity, Udall said.

"At the same time, we're not vulnerable there like we are with liquid fuels," Udall said. "We import most of our petroleum."

Udall said he believes there is widespread support in Congress for encouraging the development of fuel from renewable sources, but finding the money will be a challenge.

Sundrop Fuels' technology was developed at the University of Colorado in Boulder and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden.

The company's 3-acre pilot facility includes an array of solar panels that produces heat to power a 60-foot tower where finely ground wood or agricultural waste is converted to gasoline or diesel fuel.

Simmons said using solar energy means Sundrop doesn't have to burn some of its plant material to fuel the process, resulting in a higher yield of fuel per ton of biomass than other types of biofuels facilities.

Sundrop Fuels' next step is building a demonstration plant that could produce 8 million to 10 million gallons of fuel annually. The plant is expected to start operating by late 2012 and a commercial plant by late 2015.

The company likely will build the plants in the Southwest, possibly in New Mexico or South California, because the region's sunlight is more direct. Simmons said Colorado likely will be a major source for the plant material, including trees killed by bark beetles.

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