

## UTIA Press Release

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# Sun Grant Initiative Gathers Energy

Audio: [MP3](#), [WAV](#)

(KNOXVILLE, Tenn.) - The University of Tennessee is one step closer to becoming a regional hub for biobased energy research.

On November 5, legislation supporting the Sun Grant Initiative was included in the federal Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 Agriculture Appropriations Bill. The Sun Grant Initiative involves creating university-based research, extension and educational programs for biobased energy technologies, and the UT Agricultural Experiment Station is one of five proposed regional centers.

UT would serve as the Southeastern sun grant center of excellence, serving Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. Other centers would include South Dakota State University, Oklahoma State University, Oregon State University and Cornell University.

U.S. Senators Bill Frist, R-Tenn., and Tom Daschle, D-S.D., co-sponsored the legislation. The bipartisan initiative is intended to reduce the nation's reliance on foreign oil and nonrenewable sources of energy. An added benefit is the enhancement of the nation's rural economies through the production and processing of farm commodities for non-food uses and value-added products.

The legislation, if passed by Congress this year, would authorize the regional centers of excellence. "Being attached to the appropriations bill is a necessary step in the funding process," said Dr. Tom Klindt, associate dean of the UT Experiment Station. "We appreciate Senator Frist's support in this process. The next step is for the FY 2005 budget authorization to actually fund the centers."

If the initiative is funded, a total of \$25 million would be available to the regional centers in FY 2005. Each center would use approximately \$5 million in federal grants to fund biobased energy and value-added research and education programs in the region on a competitive basis. The legislation allows for funding levels to jump to \$75 million in FY 2007.

"The country must examine alternative sources of energy to reduce our dependence and reliance on imported oil," said Frist. "It is my belief that bioenergy resources can complement petroleum energy resources while also providing alternative income sources for our American farmers."

Frist continued, "The University of Tennessee has been successfully researching alternative bioenergy sources for many years and will be a vital resource to the country as a center of excellence."

U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., also supports the initiative. "The Sun Grant Initiative would move our nation toward greater energy independence, as well as creating a significant new market for farmers in Tennessee and across the nation," he said.

Renewable fuels such as ethanol are among the best-known non-food uses for farm commodities, but the potential exists for many other biobased products, including pharmaceuticals, building materials, bioplastics, textiles, lubricants, solvents and adhesives.

"UT is already involved in biofuel, bioplastic and textile research," said Klindt. "The Sun Grant Initiative will invest in continued and new research into alternative uses for agricultural commodities. Independent farm families and their rural communities will benefit from the results of that research."

Agriculture and natural resource industries are vital cogs in the Tennessee and national economies, and expanding the number of biobased products will enhance both rural and metropolitan economies. "Meeting the critical needs of our citizens is part of the mission of land-grant institutions," said Klindt. "UT is pleased to be recognized as the Southeastern regional center for this national research priority," he said.

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