



ADM breaks ground for new plastics plant

Sean Keen

Herald Staff Writer

— CLINTON — Archer Daniels Midland officials heralded their latest expansion as a significant step toward reducing the nation's reliance on foreign oil at a groundbreaking ceremony for their natural plastic plant Monday morning. Natural Plastic — known by the chemical name polyhydroxyalkanoate, or PHA — is a biodegradable corn-based plastic that will be used to manufacture a variety products now made from petroleum.

The new plant is a result of a partnership between ADM and Cambridge, Mass.-based Metabolix Inc.

Their joint venture has been dubbed Telles, and the renewable plastic will be marketed as Mirel.

Mirel can be used in a variety of applications where traditional petroleum-based plastic is currently used, including coated paper, molded goods, automotive parts and food packaging.

Unlike petroleum-based plastics, which do not break down naturally, Mirel is naturally biodegradable in a wide range of environments, leaving no harmful byproducts.

At the groundbreaking, Patricia Woertz, chairwoman, CEO and president of ADM, said Mirel is an important step in responding to some of the country's most pressing challenges, including reducing reliance on foreign oil.

"Every product made from Mirel will be one less product made from petroleum, and one more step toward that path of energy security and environmental improvement," she said.

"We're celebrating the start of a new and important product," Woertz continued. "Mirel renewable plastic represents a new evolution of products that meet customers' and consumers' demand for environmentally sound alternatives."

U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, lauded ADM for its leadership in the development of biofuels and expressed excitement about the impact of the new plant.

"The horizons are almost unlimited," Harkin said. "... it is a big day for Iowa, for our country. New opportunities, new jobs, new value-added uses for our corn harvest. But, I think we've also got to see this in kind of a larger perspective: as part of an amazing revolution in the way that we produce fuels and materials."

"We are on the cusp, I think, of a whole new era of manufacturing new products," he added. "And the science is incredible."

"The bottom line is, when we draw our fuel and plastics from the farm fields of the Midwest instead of the oil fields of the Middle East, it's a win-win-win for everyone," Harkin continued. "It's good for our natural security, it's good for the environment and it's obviously very good for our economy here in Iowa."

Jay Kouba, chairman, CEO and president of Metabolix, said years of research work have led to the development of Mirel. He explained the scientific work by the founders of Metabolix was critical in developing Mirel.

"The journey that brought us here today has been a long one," he explained. "The possibility of Mirel began more than 15 years ago in a laboratory at MIT with the work of our founders."

Kouba added he hopes the Mirel name will become synonymous with environmentally friendly plastic products.

Woertz noted ADM currently employs approximately 800 people in Clinton, and said the community was a natural choice for the new facility.

"As large and global as we are, when it came time to decide where to build this plant ... we knew right where to come," Woertz said, "We've always been able to count on this community for the hard work and dedication."

John Rice, ADM executive vice president — global marketing and risk management, said the new facility will create about 100 new jobs. The plant is scheduled to open in the fourth quarter of 2008. Speakers at the groundbreaking also said the benefits extend far beyond Iowa's borders.

"This facility and the partnership that brought it here are the first steps of growth down the path that will lead to a better future for farmers, for our country, and perhaps, indeed for our planet," said Woertz.

"Hang onto your seats, because that seat's gonna be made from bio-based products," Harkin remarked.