

Multi-blend pump opens

By DARRELL BOONE

DAVE Miller may not be one of Jay County's biggest farmers, but few can match his enthusiasm for ethanol.

He sells corn to the local POET ethanol plant. "Now I can haul it to POET in a vehicle that's powered by corn like I just raised, which is kind of a complete cycle," he says. "I think that's pretty cool."

On April 21 Miller opened the state's first ethanol blender pump in Portland. Ethy Pump-N-Go will offer customers a choice between regular gas with 10% ethanol, E85 and E30, a blend of 30% ethanol and 70% gas. Miller hopes the new option to use E30 will pay off for his customers, station and Indiana corn farmers.

Better mileage

Miller, whose day job is managing the Portland Airport, including an aerial crop application service, says a 30% blend is the "magic number" at which E30 actually slightly exceeds regular gasoline in fuel mileage. This would counter mileage lag, one of the key objections to E85.

A 2007 research study co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy and the American Coalition for Ethanol found that in some cases mid-range blends of ethanol, such as 20% or 30%, got slightly better gas mileage than regular gasoline.

And while neither federal regulations nor automakers currently recommend anything greater than a 10% ethanol blend in non-flex-fuel vehicles, Miller unabashedly says he regularly uses E30 with mildly enhanced fuel mileage and no ill effects.

Miller credits Jay Berry, founder of Central Indiana Ethanol, Marion, for helping him through the process of getting the station going, including landing a \$20,000 grant from Indiana's State Department of Agriculture. Miller also procures E85 from CIE, which has Indiana's only injection-blending system.

With the drastic drop in gas prices since last summer, ethanol has had a hard time competing. But Miller is confident that will change.

"We all know where gas prices are headed," he says. "And when they go up, our E30 will be very competitive. What product can you buy that's cheaper, gets better gas mileage, is better for the environment and is renewable?"

Blending wall challenge

While blender pumps like Miller's help sell more ethanol, it's going to take more than just blender pumps to move the industry forward, says Greg Noble, POET Biorefining - Portland.

"The current production capacity of the ethanol industry is already equal to or greater than the amount of ethanol the public was using before the recession," Noble says. "But a 30-year-old EPA rule only allows an arbitrary 10% blend for non-flex-fuel vehicles."

Noble explains that until the rule is

modified, there's no way the industry can move forward to meet federally mandated Renewable Fuel Standards. Nor will it move into cellulosic technology that many believe will help with the food-vs.-fuel debate.

"Blender pumps will help, but it's going to take a change in that EPA regulation to really address the problem,"

Noble says.

Boone writes from Wabash.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING:

This multi-blend ethanol pump opened at a farmer-owned gas station in Portland recently.



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