



## Conference: Biomass needs regulatory, government support

By Anna Austin

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Jim Stewart of the California Bioenergy Producers Association relayed a simple message to the 400-plus attendees of Biomass Magazine's Pacific Northwest Biomass Conference & Expo: it's time to begin confronting the real issues involved in developing a constructive statutory and regulatory environment for bioenergy production.

Stewart referred to biomass as the "holy grail of sustainability," touting production of ethanol from organic wastes as the only pathway available that can meet or exceed the goals for greenhouse gas reduction established in California's Low Carbon Fuel Standard. "Many of us here have attended conferences before where we have a chance to network, say nice things about innovative technologies we're working on, listen to a few speeches proclaiming the need for a better environment, and go home perhaps feeling a little better about ourselves without confronting the real issues," he said. "But the time has come for a frank discussion and coordinated action. We will never achieve our goals for renewable energy and a better environment for this nation without a cooperative effort between business, labor, government and the environmental community."

America generates 1.5 billion to 2 billion tons of carbon-based wastes annually, according to Stewart, about 500 million tons of which are readily available to convert into energy. In 2008, a recession year in which municipal solid waste (MSW) generation declined by 10 percent, California still landfilled 35.5 million tons of post-recycled material. "Just from this single source of biomass, thermal conversion technologies could coproduce 1.6 billion gallons of ethanol and about 1,250 megawatts (MW) of power, turning the state into a net exporter of ethanol," he said.

Stewart referred to a recent study by the International Energy Agency that found that production in the world's oil fields is declining by 7 percent per year, and predicted that the world will need eight more Saudi Arabia's by 2030 to make up for the decline and meet projected global oil demand. "The way to achieve this goal is not to devastate the environment to recover oil from tar sands in Canada—to me that is direct and indirect land-use change of far greater impact than anything that could be projected from corn or cellulosic biomass, and yet it is just one of the factors relating to petroleum production that seems to be totally ignored by the U.S. EPA in its rulemaking."

Big Oil runs countless ads talking about how "green" they are, Stewart said, but for years behind the scenes they have been contributing millions of dollars to think tanks and university professors who write white papers that challenge global warming and attempt to undermine the viability of ethanol. "By doing so, they deflect attention from the more significant impacts of fossil fuels," he said. All of the industry needs to acknowledge that global warming is a threat if not a crisis, that the day of peak oil is fast approaching and that renewable energy is no longer an alternative."

In 2009, the DOE awarded grants to a wide range of emerging renewable energy technologies including \$193 million for six thermal biomass conversion projects supporting a total investment of \$410 million, none of which will be built in California. "Why is this happening? It's happening because California has a statutory and regulatory environment that is driving biobased technology providers and investment capital out of the state," Stewart said. "As further evidence, the governor announced a list of 244 renewable energy projects now being proposed to help meet the renewable portfolio standard (RPS) goal of 33 percent by 2022, and only three were for biomass conversion."

Stewart said the BPA is sponsoring legislation to expedite the introduction of new conversion technologies that will produce advanced biofuels and/or green power from organic waste materials. AB 222, which addresses the issues necessary to achieve this goal, passed in the California State Assembly 54-13 during the 2009 legislative session in Sacramento, after having been approved by a unanimous bipartisan vote in the Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee. In July 2009, it was approved in the Senate Utilities, Energy and Communications Committee. However, the Senate Environmental Quality Committee elected not to act on the bill and converted it into a two-year bill, which cannot pass the State Senate and be signed by the Governor until 2010, and will not take effect until January 2011 at the earliest. During those intervening 17 months, the state will

place another 50 million tons of post-recycled municipal waste in its landfills, which theoretically could support the annual production of 1.6 billion gallons of ethanol and approximately 1,250 MW of power. Stewart urged attendees to contact the Senate and demand the legislation be passed.

For several years, the BPA has seen opposition orchestrated by Californians Against Waste, which is funded by the recycling industry. “These are the companies that are sending California’s recyclable materials to China, Nigeria and India where there are limited, if any, environmental controls. Their goal, in delaying the introduction of new technologies, is to force state sanitation districts to rely on existing recycling practices to meet their mandates for landfill diversion.”

The environmental abuses from the foreign outsourcing of recycling are well documented, Stewart added. “We believe they have a duty to address these abuses before challenging the viability of environmentally advantageous conversion technologies. The bottom line is that this is not an environmental battle; it’s an economic competition to California’s waste streams,” he said. “California’s population is expected to grow by some 10 million people in the next 25 years. Unless more flexibility in legislation and regulatory policies is put into place for its biomass resources to be better used for energy production and improving the business climate for biobased technology in California, the state will landfill more than 1 billion tons of MSW during the next 20 years.”