

N.C. man heads to D.C. to make a case for biofuels

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By [JASON HARDIN](#)
Staff Writer

Dean Price has long had a vision: Knock out Big Oil. In its place? Call it Small Biofuel.

Now, the Stokesdale man has a chance to share that dream. He'll be in Washington today meeting with Cabinet members and other top administration officials as part of a discussion about the future of energy.

Price and a business partner, Gary Sink, own a truck stop in Virginia where they manufacture biodiesel made from locally grown canola. His dream is to take that model — and replicate it nationwide.

It's a way to stop sending money to countries that fund terrorism and to help struggling rural areas, all in a single stroke.

"We sent about 600 billion dollars to petrodictators last year," Price said. "Let's make farmers the new oil barons."

Such enterprises could be run as co-ops among farmers and could take advantage of a vast natural resource: fallow land that could be put to use growing the canola crop.

Rural America has been hit hard in recent years, Price said. Big box stores have replaced mom-and-pop businesses, and oil prices have taken a toll. In both cases, money flows out of small communities, he said, rather than being recirculated.

Some counties in Virginia have unemployment rates topping 20 percent. "These are Depression-type numbers," he said.

Involving local growers in the production of energy could reverse those trends, he said, while keeping money in the local economy.

Price sees this as a time of transition. An economy based on cheap oil is no longer sustainable. While that implies uncertainty and difficult choices, Price tends to see benefits as well.

For many, the economy and lifestyles of the past several decades have a downside: brutally long commutes, small towns drained of vitality, food produced a country — if not a continent — away.

"Our lifestyles are going to be a lot different, but the quality of life is going to get a lot better," he said.

As far as federal action, Price favors "cap and trade" legislation aimed at curtailing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

There wasn't a lot of time to ponder whether to go. The invitation only arrived Thursday.



Jerry Wolford (News & Record)

N.C. A&T's Abolghasem Shahbazi (left) and Red Birch Energy plant manager Derrick Gortman.

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"As you know, the debate over our energy future is one of the most important of our times," it said.

Price is excited about the invitation and what he believes it represents, and not just for his Red Birch truck stop.

"I am thrilled," he said. "This is the progressive movement. And the progressive movement is for the little man. It's for farmers and truck stop owners. It's for the entrepreneurs."

Price, who has the enthusiasm of an evangelist when it comes to biofuel and its implications, can get on a roll when he's on his favorite subject.

He concedes it might be tough to pack all his ideas into his allotted time today.

"If they give me 20 minutes, I'll do my best."

Contact Jason Hardin at 373-7021 or jason.hardin@news-record.com

200 E. Market Street, Greensboro, NC 27401 (336) 373-7000 (800) 553-6880
155 Northpoint Ave., Suite 101, High Point, NC 27262 (336) 883-4422
203 E. Harris Place, Eden, NC 27288 (336) 627-1781
4213 S. Church Street, Burlington, NC 27215 (336) 449-7064

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