Conference Will Tell How America's Bioeconomy Can Clean the Planet

AMES, Iowa -- Agriculture's contribution to carbon footprinting and greenhouse gasses is pointed out in headlines from the Wall Street Journal to Successful Farming. But 12 Midwest universities are collaborating to host a virtual conference that rewrites the headlines and suggests that agriculture can clean the planet. In a collaborative effort the universities are offering "Growing the Bioeconomy: Solutions for Sustainability" on Dec. 1, 2009 to share how that might be done.

"This conference will be a day filled with presenters offering solutions for sustainability," said Paul Brown, Iowa State University Extension Agriculture & Natural Resources Assistant Director and conference chairperson. "Keynote speaker James Lovelock is one of the world's most renowned thinkers on global environmental science. In his message, Dr. Lovelock calls upon farmers to convert agricultural residues to biochar for incorporation into the soil as the solution to global climate change."

Lovelock's presentation will be delivered via live feed to all participants. The morning plenary session will also include presentations by Johannes Lehmann, associate professor of soil fertility management and soil biogeochemistry at Cornell University and Matt Liebman, Wallace Chair for sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University. Lehmann will discuss the combined benefit of biochar for carbon sequestration and improved soil fertility. Liebman will present research findings on integrating perennials to meet conservation and biofuel feedstock production objectives.

"This is the seventh year Iowa State University has hosted a bioeconomy conference, but the first time ISU has collaborated with 11 other universities to simultaneously hold the conference," said Brown. "Last year ISU conference participants came from 23 states and for the past few years other state universities have organized conferences with a biobased theme – it just made sense to form an alliance and work together instead of competing and repeating efforts."

From Wyoming to Ohio and Minnesota to Kansas, universities will co-host conference sites and share content through high-speed communication systems. Participants have the option of attending a state sponsored site, signing on as a corporate location or logging into the conference from anyplace in the world. Iowa State University is managing the conference registration and virtual conference technology. Specific information about participation options and conference registration are available at http://www.bioeconomyconference.org/registration.

Conference co-hosts University of Nebraska (UN), Michigan State University (MSU), North Dakota State University (NDSU) and Purdue University are organizing and e-hosting the afternoon concurrent sessions. The session begins at 1 p.m. and offers two tracks – net greenhouse gas emission from biofuel systems, hosted by UN; and non-traditional feedstocks, hosted by MSU. The second concurrent session begins at 3:30 and covers topics related to advances and breakthroughs in biofuels, hosted by NDSU; and bioenergy economic and policy issues, hosted by Purdue. All tracks have four speakers; speaker and topic details are available at http://www.bioeconomyconference.org/speakers/session.htm.

In addition to previously mentioned institutions, conference partners include Kansas State University, Ohio State University, South Dakota State University, University of Minnesota, University of Missouri, University of Wisconsin, University of Wyoming, North Central bioeconomy Consortium, and North Central Sun Grant Initiative. Additional conference information is available at http://www.bioeconomyconference.org/ .

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