

Global warming effects highlight Farmfest forum

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Global warming is on a lot of peoples' minds, and those in Minnesota's ag industry are no exception.

Arctic explorer Will Steger will offer the keynote address at the Farmfest forum, "Global Warming: Agriculture's Role in Finding Solutions."

From his years of exploration in the arctic, Steger, from Ely, will discuss the changes he has seen and experienced due to the warming of the arctic. He will also talk about the impact that global warming may potentially have on the world around us.

In addition to Steger, panelists from Minnesota's ag industry will speak on global warming from an agricultural perspective.

Serving as chair of the Minnesota Governor's Biodiesel Task Force, as well as a director with the American Soybean Association, Kristin Weeks Duncanson knows a thing or two about biodiesel.

"We live in a state that is a model for renewable fuels," Weeks Duncanson said. She believes that agriculture has a role as far as climate change policy and practice.

The Governor's Biodiesel Task Force was enacted after 2-percent biodiesel usage was mandated. The task force is "making sure that the biodiesel program is up and running throughout the state," she said. The task force also works on what can be done in the future for the expansion of Minnesota's biodiesel industry.

"Biodiesel has been very market-driven," she said,



"Global Warming: Agriculture's Role in Finding Solutions" will be at 1:30 p.m. Aug. 7 in the Forum Tent.

adding that the market will dictate we use more and more biodiesel. She said people are serious about the types of engines and fuels they use. Ethanol and biodiesel will be part of the mix of initiatives for the next generation.

As a participant in the "Global Warming" forum, Weeks Duncanson hopes the forum will be a "good exchange about peoples'

understanding of climate change."

Ethanol, touted as a cleaner-burning fuel that reduces harmful tailpipe emissions, has become a vital part of the renewable fuels equation. Minnesota farmers have become a big player in that equation with more of them growing corn each year to fuel the many ethanol plants in the state.

Currently serving on the National Corn Growers Association board, Gene Sandager will also be a part of the global warming forum. "There is a lot of hype about global warming," Sandager said. There is also a lot of adverse publicity about agriculture's role in global warming, according to Sandager.

He believes that while corn has gone from just being food to also being utilized for energy, ethanol overall is better for the environment than regular fuel. Looking at the cost to move fossil fuel oil from the well all the way to the tanks of consumers, and the CO₂ consumption that takes place during that process, he said ethanol is still ahead of the cost game.

In being a part of this panel, Sandager hopes that the forum will "look at different points of view. How different ag products are produced and which in the long term connect all the dots." Sandager believes

debate will show which points are more viable than others, and "(look) at where the holes are in different philosophies."

There is wide criticism from some who believe that corn-on-corn is bad for the environment, taking corn that was to be used for food and using it for energy. "We can produce corn-on-corn and have it be environmentally safe," he said.

According to Sandager, we cannot replace fossil fuels with corn alone, but with wind and other crops someday we can.

Harvesting energy from the skies has been gaining momentum in the state. Mark Willer, CEO of Minwind, a wind energy company located in Luverne, will also be a panelist in the forum.

Within the liquid fuel industry Willer believes there is a place for agriculture to be involved in new transmissions to meet the country's energy needs. "There are lots of changes happening. People need to be aware of all these things," he said.

"When it comes to wind energy, I don't think we have seen it start yet." He hopes that those who listen to the forum panelists will understand that "the whole energy plane is changing."

There are a lot of people in this country working on energy solutions, all the way from the legislature into the private sector. According to Willers, it is amazing how many people are working on these different pieces.

The energy sector is changing dramatically; Willer equates the change to the time when agriculture moved from horses to tractors to increase field work efficiency.

"Energy is changing and agriculture will be a part of it," he said.

Rounding out the panel is Loni Kemp, senior political analyst with the Minnesota Project.

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