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## Biofuels center boasts teamwork

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Catawba County leaders say a newly opened biodiesel research facility will attract more business to the area, save money on fuel and reduce the area's carbon footprint. State leaders call it a "model for the future."

But the largest attribute of the facility may be the collaboration between big groups – something federal, state and local leaders all agree is necessary for positive change.

The Catawba County-Appalachian State University Biodiesel Research, Development and Production Facility is open, and officials are excited about the future and existing benefits the center will produce.

"This furthers a future in biodiesel research, and helps us take one step closer to being independent of oil," said Kitty Barnes, Catawba County Board of Commissioners chair. "Biodiesel burns cleaner and helps lower the carbon footprint for the county."

The biodiesel facility is located inside the Catawba County EcoComplex near Blackburn Landfill and is the first of its kind in the area. Staff will use it to do several different things.

One of the main missions for staff is experimenting with environmental resources to determine which have the best production performance, fuel quality and emissions. They will also develop biodiesel combustion and emissions test protocol for fuels produced by the facility from various test feed stocks, according to EcoComplex officials.

The staff will also test biofuels made at the facility using a mobile emissions analyzer in a Volkswagen test vehicle. The unit measures nitrogen oxide, sodium oxide, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and total hydrocarbons, using flame ionization and mass spectrometer analysis, officials said.

The facility's staff will do all these things through a multi-layer partnership. The facility costs about \$3.2 million, and ASU contributed \$1.6 million to the project, including \$1.45 million in grants from the Golden LEAF Foundation, U.S. Dept. of Energy, UNC General Administration Research Competitiveness Fund and the Biofuels Center of N.C.

ASU Chancellor Kenneth E. Peacock said the facility would not be possible without the large partnership.

"This shows what partners can do while working together," Peacock said.

"We are celebrating that this partnership is making a difference in the lives of individuals. We are here to celebrate how this can be a role model for other areas and states to see."

Because the facility will eventually produce 100,000 gallons of biodiesel fuel each year, Peacock said the center can help “unleash” jobs in the biofuels and research industries.

N.C. Biofuels Center CEO Steven Burke said the facility is helping the state meet their goal of producing 10 percent liquid fuels sold in North Carolina with locally grown and produced biofuels by 2017. He said the facility demonstrates what he thinks is the four key elements to becoming less dependent of oil – biofuels, civic, community and vision.

“With biofuels, we can gain large amounts from our own community,” Burke said, adding that it is their goal by 2017 to produce 600 million gallons of biofuels through different production facilities “peppered” throughout the state. The other benefits Barnes and other officials discussed the benefits of the biofuels facility at its grand opening Monday.

In addition to its positive environmental impact, the facility will help in several ways, officials said.

Because of the collaboration with Appalachian and the other funding groups, the facility is expected to help the county attract more business to Catawba County.

“The presence of higher education institutions like Appalachian State in a sector producing this kind of energy is going to provide new avenues for growth, research and investment for the future of Catawba County and its citizens,” said Scott Millar, Catawba County Economic Development Corp. president.

The facility will produce biodiesel fuel for about half the cost of regular diesel in the current market – savings that could be shared with municipalities and school systems in the future, Barnes said.

“The potential savings on fuel can go to schools and other groups in the county,” Barnes said, adding that savings on operational costs to the county will help keep tipping fees stable.

For more information about the biofuels research and production facility, visit [catawbacountync.gov/depts/u&e/ecocomplex.asp](http://catawbacountync.gov/depts/u&e/ecocomplex.asp).

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CATAWBA COUNTY, N.C.

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