

Sekab says cellulosic ethanol on track in Sweden within five years

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Swedish ethanol producer Sekab said it is on the track to deliver its first commercial cellulosic ethanol in 2012 or 2013. The company plans to start building its first, second-stage Industrial Development plant in Örnsköldsvik, Sweden, at the end of this year, Anders Fredriksson, deputy manager of Sekab Biofuels & Chemicals told Swedish farmers' weekly ATL.

"We are ready to put the shovels into the ground at the end of the year, as soon as we have all the financing secured," Mr Fredriksson said, adding the plant would be in operation by 2010.

The development plant, valued at around 1 bln, will have a capacity of 6,000 cubic metres of cellulosic ethanol per year.

Today, Sekab is using wood cuts as the feed stock at its pilot plant, but the company is also testing bagasse, a cellulose fibre residue from sugar production.

There are hundreds of similar research and development projects around the globe for the second-generation biofuels based on cellulose biomass, but Anders Fredriksson claims Sekab is at the very forefront of the pack.

"Others have focused on smaller segments of the production. I believe that we have come much longer in the mastering the whole industrial process. Everyone is watching what is happening in Sweden now," he told ATL.

As soon as Sekab is confident it has a functioning production method, it is planning to commercialise on this by selling or through other business ventures allow its know-how to be used by other operators.

Anders Fredriksson said that the industrial production process of cellulosic ethanol that Sekab is developing should be able to handle different kinds of feedstock. Which feedstock Sekab eventually will settle for, and to be used in its third stage for an up-scaled production plant, is not yet decided.

The company imports Brazilian ethanol to Europe and has started biofuel production ventures in Tanzania and Mozambique. However, the choice of feedstock will decide the location of its next move.

"It could be here in Sweden, but it could also be in Brazil or Tanzania," Mr Fredriksson said.

However, sugarcane and bagasse is superior to most other bioenergy crops and delivers 12,400 litres of ethanol per hectare compared with only 2,900 litres for wheat and straws, according to Sekab.

The world is anxiously awaiting cellulosic ethanol as some of the current first-generation ethanol based on crops such as maize and grains have put pressure on food supplies and commodity prices around the world.

Based on the progress made at Sekab's site in Örnsköldsvik, Anders Fredriksson is optimistic and said he believes that in 2015 or 2016, cellulosic ethanol will be available in large volumes on the world markets.