

Bio-Fuel Project at M.C.T.C.

Merging Kentucky Farmers, & Energy Producers



Wes Mattox, with the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife, discusses calibration for the seeder that was used to disperse the seed, donated by RoundStone Native Seed in Upton Kentucky.



The University of Kentucky's College of Agriculture has established pilot projects within the state of Kentucky for growing switch grass plots as an alternative, or in addition to or as an alternative to other crops such as corn, soybeans and tobacco. Maysville Community and Technical College planted a five acre plot of a perennial switch grass in the spring of 2010. The variety of this grass is called, 'Cave in Rock', which is estimated to reach approximately ten feet high. We are conducting this project to educate the public about its potential to be used as a crop that can be processed as a bio-fuel alternative, a diversification option for farmers to grow within our region.

East Kentucky Power Cooperative is partnering with UK in the pilot program and the college is very excited to be a part of this project because it will give growers options to make money with alternative crops. We are participating and working with projects like this to educate individuals in our communities and industries about cutting edge technologies by utilizing natural products, such as this grass. It will be harvested, similarly to hay, in the fall of 2011 and has a twenty year life cycle, which makes the plant appealing for long-term use. Power plants like EKPC can take the pelletized plant material and mix it with coal and other materials to fuel power plants; this cuts down on emissions and

also gives farmers more opportunities to grow crops for economic benefits.

Dennis Perry is my counterpart who is an instructional specialist for agriculture at the Rowan campus of the community college, located in Morehead understands that this project will be conducted to showcase our agricultural roots within our region. Agricultural businesses have changed and the connection to plants and products that we use every day is vital; through bio-fuel experiments, such as this we can take natural materials and convert them into energy. Maysville's campus is a great location for this community experiment, which we hope will promote to create awareness about this new product that can be raised on our regional farms. In addition to being used as a bio-fuel, switch grass can be used as feed for livestock.

Diversification is important, especially in light of the changes to the tobacco industry over the last ten to fifteen years. So many businesses in our region and neighboring counties are growing a vast diversity of crops to create new products, but the goal is still the same, to allow them to work with the land and continue doing what they love. Farmers interested in trying switch grass can visit the campus and learn about the crop and how it is planted and maintained.

Switch grass is a perennial native to Kentucky and relatively easy to maintain, which makes it appealing to grow in the fields Kentucky and Southern Ohio. We will monitor it for diseases, fungus and other potentially harmful factors, such as invasive weeds. This project engages agriculture and horticulture professionals from the community, the extension offices, farm supply companies and small business owners, which are often interconnected. Thomas Keene, who is an educator and agronomist from the University of Kentucky, has been instrumental as a consultant for this project.

Please contact me if you have horticulture or agriculture questions.

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