

The Des Moines Register

Iowa's Vermeer to share in biomass research effort

Aug. 14, 2013



File photo: Work takes place at a welding simulator at Vermeer Manufacturing in Pella. (David Purdy/The Des Moines Register) / David Purdy/ The Register

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The U.S. Department of Energy announced a nearly \$6 million effort to make it easier to use corn stover and other biomass to produce biofuels.

The research led by Columbus, Ohio-based FDC Enterprises will include work by Vermeer, the Iowa-based equipment firm, along with biofuels companies in Iowa, Kansas, Virginia and Tennessee.

Among the partners: Vermeer, Poet, Archer Daniels Midland and Clariant International.

“This commitment gives Vermeer the opportunity to pull product development forward,” Jay Van Roekel, Vermeer’s strategic business unit manager, said in statement. “It gives focus to a developing product line, which will get the right solutions to a new market much faster.”

Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz said in a statement that the idea is to reduce costs for harvesting, handling and preprocessing of wood, grass and crop wastes, for example.

The government is supporting efforts to find ways to make biofuels out of something other than corn, the main feedstock for U.S. biofuels plants now. The hope is that the other materials will be cheaper and more efficient to use, freeing corn for feed and other uses.

The Energy Department has for three years supported research into testing new commercial harvesting equipment that could reduce costs and make the industry more efficient, Moniz noted.