

Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce
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Press Release

For Immediate Release, February 13, 2003

Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce Uses Corn as Fuel Alternative

To lower heating costs and utilize renewable fuels from agriculture, Commissioner of Agriculture Lester Spell has had corn burning heating systems installed in two buildings at the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum. The Forestry Auditorium and the Ethnic Heritage Center are now heated solely by Mississippi grown corn. The Superior Biomass Furnace is thermostat controlled and distributes warm air through conventional ducts. The furnaces were installed to display an alternative heat source that can result in lower heating expenses and reduce dependence on foreign petroleum products.

“The heating unit is easy to install and operate, and the corn it uses as fuel is renewable, cheap, and readily available to most people in Mississippi,” Spell said. “The efficiency of the unit allows corn to burn at a rate resulting in substantial cost savings compared to traditional heating fuels. We have looked at many alternatives to reduce operating costs and these heaters are a natural for our facilities. Given the uncertainty of supply coupled with rising prices of foreign petroleum products now is the time to invest in renewable alternative energy potentials that are right here in our state.”

Ja-Ran Enterprises Inc. produces and sells the furnaces. Randy McLachlan, inventor and co-owner, has sold and designed corn furnaces for over 15 years. Ja-Ran offers 100,000 BTU and 200,000 BTU furnaces. An average home in Mississippi can be heated with the smaller unit over the winter months. The 4400 square foot Forestry Auditorium is heated by the 200,000 BTU furnace, and the 3700 sq. ft. Ethnic Heritage Center is using the 100,000 BTU furnace.

State Representatives Billy McCoy (Rienzi) and Steve Holland (Plantersville) have seen the furnace under operation. McCoy, Chairman of Ways and Means Committee, is an advocate for alternative energy applications in Mississippi. “The corn burning furnace not only offers a replacement for foreign petroleum-based fuels but also provides economic benefit for the user,” McCoy said. “I am impressed with the ease of maintenance and efficiency shown by this furnace.”

Holland, Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, added, “This furnace provides a heating alternative that can decrease heating costs for many people. Corn is an ideal fuel because prices are less volatile than other fuels, it is available on the farm, and it is renewable. Heating with corn is environmentally sound. This also provides another market for corn of low quality that would not get top price in the grain markets.”

Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Joe Stogner (Sandy Hook), looks at the Superior Biomass Furnace as an opportunity to provide cheaper, renewable heating fuels to rural areas. “Many Mississippians living in rural areas pay high fuel rates in the winter months to heat their homes and other buildings. From one year to the next, people don’t know what to expect to pay for heat. This corn furnace could enable these people to have lower heating costs burning an agriculturally derived fuel produced in Mississippi.”

Corn is a very clean burning fuel. It leaves very little residue, which is collected in an ash pan, and produces no odor through the exhaust vent. Spell added, “You only have to dump the ash bin out about once a month, and we already know these furnaces will significantly reduce our heating expenses.”