

## Memphis Could Be Home To \$8b 'Bioeconomy'

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A study by a Memphis nonprofit group proposes major changes in the way agricultural land in the Delta is used to create a bioeconomy worth \$8 billion with more than 25,000 jobs in the next decade.

The study commissioned by Memphis Bioworks Foundation was released last week. It says 36 million acres in the Mississippi Delta now producing cotton and trees could be converted to producing plants that could be turned into biofuels or plastics.

"This is recognized as one of the most productive farmlands in the country," Steve Bares, executive director of the Bioworks Foundation, told The Memphis Daily News.

He said the agricultural changes proposed by the study wouldn't reduce food crops, which is one of the criticisms of corn-based ethanol production.

As petroleum-based products are replaced with plant-based ones, a bioeconomy could produce 50,000 jobs in the region in the next 20 years, the study conducted by consulting firm Battelle Technology Partnership Practice concludes.

Besides biofuels and polymers for plastic products, alternative plants could be turned into lubricants or briquettes that can be used with coal to produce electricity.

Agencies from Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee helped fund the study.

Bares said Memphis not only is surrounded by millions of acres of farmland but also has lots of shuttered manufacturing sites that easily could be converted to process biobased materials.

The city already has one company producing bioproducts. PMC Biogenix Inc. transforms agricultural materials into cling wrap, according to Peter Nelson, AgBio co-coordinator for Memphis Bioworks.

"For Memphis, this study makes it clear that we have a dual role," Bares said. "One is to take advantage of our own underutilized industrial capacity, our strong business infrastructure and our unique agricultural assets and to develop them. The second is to provide a regional approach that will build strong collaborations."

Although the city has infrastructure to help support the processing end, a network needs to be established between farmers and manufacturers, Bares said.

Farmers also have to be persuaded to give alternative crops a try. Bioworks has created the 25Farmer Network, a partnership with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, that matches farmers willing to try alternative crops with buyers.

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"Each one of those we're developing a multiyear partnership with to build out the new supply chain," Nelson said.

The Memphis Bioworks Foundation was created in 2001 to foster bioscience research and business in the city. It has worked with public and private business and academic and government organizations on projects that include the University of Tennessee-Baptist Research Park, a science and engineering charter school and investment fund supporting new bioscience ventures.

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