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Karnataka to host National Biofuel conference

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The Karnataka State Biofuel Development Board has announced that the national conference on Biofuels will be held in Bangalore on February 22 this year. The board stressed that the event will focus on 'Accelerating Biofuel programs in India'.

The day-long conference being held at Hotel Capitol in Bangalore will focus on generating winning ideas from the pioneers in the industry to eventually look at some intervention and suggestions to bring about changes in the national biofuel policy.

Speaking about the need for the intervention, Mr A K Monnappa, managing director, Karnataka State Bio Fuel Development Board, quoted facts. He said, "India imports over 80 percent of its petroleum needs spending a whopping Rs Eight lakh crore a year ($128,640 million), which is the single-most critical component of the import bill of the nation. This is not only exerting a lot of financial stress but also leading us towards an energy crisis. In spite of such imports, rural India suffers energy shortages which is adversely affecting agri-operations and quality of life, resulting in avoidable migration to urban areas."

He further said, "It is estimated that India has the potential to substitute at least 30 percent of these imports through biofuels which could make a huge difference to our foreign exchange situation and to rural prosperity. If we could do miracles in food and milk production, we can definitely report the success in biofuels too."

Adding, "This conference will be inaugurated by Dr Satish B Agnihotri, secretary, MNRE. He would also be chairing the concluding session of the conference. Through the conference we aim to address some of the major concerns of the value chain of the biofuel development program. Our counterparts from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra amongst others would present their success stories. The reviews of various stakeholders would be heard."He said, the executive chairman of the board, Mr GVK Rau, ACS and development commissioner and Mr Vijay Bhaskar, ACS, department of rural development and Panchayat Raj of Government of Karnataka will also be present at the event.

Further, Mr Monnappa explained that the concluding panel discussion would present the crux of the program. "The panel discussion will revolve around suggestions for new initiatives and policy changes that are required on the national level. The novel initiatives that would help the country scale up on the global level will be summed up."

Claiming that every policy worth its salt should be valued once in 4-5 years, Mr Divakar Rao, Vision Group on Biotechnology, Government of Karnataka said that if this is not done, policies remain merely on paper.

"There is a need to take a second look at the policy. New components need to be added. We are looking at certain replicable models. Karnataka's board strives to take forward the biofuel movement in the state with a farmer-centric, multi-species

approach which is supported by a well thought out infrastructure designed to support all stages of the value chain of biofuels," he said.

Further explaining, "In the meeting of the reconstituted MNRE Working Group on biofuels held in New Delhi in January 2014, it was aptly decided that a national conference could be an excellent platform to deliberate on these points, and come out with ideas on new initiatives and policy changes required. Karnataka was chosen to plan and host the conference."

The conference will put together the experiences of different states in the biofuel sector. An evaluation of the progress achieved and problems faced by some of the prominent states will be discussed. Further, a discussion on achieving critical volumes in Biomass production would be held. An important aspect that is relevant in achieving the desired volumes and quality in biofuel production in a viable and sustainable manner would be discussed in the 'Managing biofuel value chain' part of the conference.

The event is being co-sponsored by the Hutti Gold Mines and Novozymes South Asia and will be attended by farmers, rural entrepreneurs, industrialists, businessmen, investors, policy makers, strategists, representatives from several states, members of the working group of MNRE, representatives from all I&D Centres of the Board, major NGOs and members of KSBDB.

The event will also witness the presence of Dr Navin Sharma, a representative from ICRAF from the World Agro-forestry Centre. The UN body is said to have noted that the path-breaking work done in Karnataka may be best suited to the needs of several developing nations of Asia and Africa.