

OSCEOLA NEWS-GAZETTE

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Energy farm part of larger Destiny plan

By Rick Madewell
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Officials with the proposed mixed-use 41,000-acre Destiny development project proposed for a site near Yeehaw Junction have created what they call Florida's first "sustainable energy farm," set to explore alternative fuel crops.

And so far, so good, according to Roz Gatewood, vice president of business development for the project. "It's been a rewarding project and process," she said. "And it's amazing the amount of support and interest we've been getting."

The energy farm's first crop is sweet sorghum and algae, jatropha and other crops will be considered in the future. "There's no point in getting started with a crop that requires a great deal of irrigation," she said, adding that the sorghum, planted in April, is nearly ready for harvest.

"Destiny's energy farm will be a proving ground for technologies and practices of the future and is a testament to our commitment to create a truly eco-sustainable community in the state," developer Anthony V. Pugliese III, of Delray Beach, stated in a recent press release. "It's just the beginning of building a city that operates with minimal impact on the environment and serves as a scientific hub where the latest green technology innovations will emerge."

Another developer in the Destiny project is Subway restaurants founder Fred DeLuca, who, along with Pugliese, purchased the Destiny property in 2005. They also own Green Sky Industries, a recycling operation headquartered in New Jersey.

Officials with the Destiny project will have a special "Unveiling of the Vision," during an exclusive luncheon Wednesday, Sept. 24, at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center. The Kissimmee/Osceola County Chamber of Commerce, the St. Cloud Greater Osceola Chamber of Commerce and the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission are sponsoring the event.

Developers said the farm is the result of a cooperative effort between several private/public individuals and companies, including the University of Florida, GreenTechnologies, Everglades Farm Equipment, American Drilling Services, Global Renewable Energy, Southern Farms, Energy Structures & Systems and Bio Greens Oil USA.

Osceola County Commission district 5 candidate Jonathan Harrell said he sees positive possibilities coming from the energy farm, which would be in his district if elected.

"Now is the time we must begin taking care of our residents in Osceola County," Harrell, a Democrat, said. "This step toward innovation and technology in creating our own alternative fuels and sustainable energy right here in Osceola County is a step in the right direction."

“As an American, I believe we must make this first step in order to break our addiction to foreign oil. As an Osceola County resident, I believe by supporting this pilot program, we can take part in leading the way nationally and statewide in creating a bridge to energy independence. If it proves successful, it could mean a variety of high-paying jobs to our county, but we will have to wait to see the final outcome of this smaller program before making a judgment call on a larger scale one.”

Other experimental plots on the energy farm, they said, would be planted to test different varieties of the sweet sorghum, soil conditions and crop yield.

Samples will be gathered and taken to the University of Florida to determine the potential ethanol production. Studies also will determine the cost of producing fuel from these types of energy crops. The first harvest is expected later this year.

The overall goal of the energy farm is to research crop species to maximize alternative fuel production for the proposed future city of Destiny, as well as to explore new agricultural food production for the community.

Gatewood said the next step being discussed for the energy farm is organic farming, which would require the help of local farmers.

“Clearly local production – as much as possible for the whole country – is what we need. To make it more sustainable within our own area makes us stronger and more resourceful with what we have,” she said.

Several attempts to contact Osceola County’s economic development administrator Maria Toumazos were unsuccessful, as she did not return calls made to her office.