

# Los Angeles Times

## Environment

### GREENSPACE

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS FROM CALIFORNIA AND BEYOND

#### California's big new ethanol plant

11:19 AM, October 11, 2008



California biofuel supplier [Pacific Ethanol Inc.](#) on Friday launched its newest plant at the Port of Stockton amid a throng of dignitaries and well-wishers. The facility can make up to 60 million gallons of the corn-based biofuel per year, making it the largest of the state's five operating ethanol plants.

The Sacramento-based company expects the facility to process 21 million bushels of corn a year, and hopes 20% of that will be grown locally, which would reduce corn imports from the Midwest. In addition to ethanol, the \$150-million plant will produce 500,000 tons of wet distillers grain for local dairies to use as feed.

California's gasoline contains nearly 6% ethanol, amounting to about 1 billion gallons a year. Pacific says it supplies about 20% of that, through in-state production and imports. State regulators have approved a new fuel formula that would include 10% ethanol in California gasoline beginning in 2010.

Corn-based ethanol remains a hotly debated subject, but even with its flaws, it is arguably preferable to gasoline, which spews asthma-causing particulates and smog-producing gases.

And it is still the only biofuel available today that's capable of displacing large amounts of gasoline in our existing cars and trucks. It's telling that oil refiner Valero Energy Corp. recently lamented that U.S. gasoline

demand was down 1.5%, but because of ethanol blending, consumption of the raw gasoline blendstock had actually dropped 3%.

Critics are pushing for other fuels, such as cellulose-derived ethanol, which would dodge the food-versus-fuel fury by not using corn. Pacific's new corn-processing plant earned more than \$600,000 in Pacific Gas & Electric rebates because it built in more efficient lighting and motors, heat recovery devices, and other energy-saving technologies. By selling wet distillers grain locally, it eliminated an energy-intensive drying process and reduced transportation-related emissions.

A host of California companies are pressing ahead with what could be better technologies and processes, among them [BlueFire Ethanol](#) and [Primafuel Inc.](#) What's more, California's [low-carbon fuel standard](#) will measure the full environmental impact of the entire menu of fuels -- and only those that can ratchet down their carbon footprint along with the state's requirements will survive here. The still-evolving rules could go into effect in 2010.

-- Elizabeth Douglass

*Photo: Pacific Ethanol plant manager Lyndon Jones, right, consults with scheduler Glenn Palso Friday at the Stockton facility. Credit: Phil Di Marino/ColorNet Inc., for Pacific Ethanol.*

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