

For Immediate Release  
January 28, 2005

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### Federal Employees to Soon Use More Corn in Homegrown Alternatives

DEWITT, MICH. – What one product can be used to make plastics, clothing, and packing materials? What renewable resource can heat your home and fuel your car? The answer to all of these questions is corn. The Corn Marketing Program of Michigan (CMPM) recently applauded a new market for this versatile grain when the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) published a final rule in the Federal Register earlier this month that requires federal agencies to give purchase preference to biobased products whenever possible.

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized the creation of a program requiring federal agencies to greatly increase their use of biobased industrial products. The new rule establishes the process by which the USDA will designate items for preferred procurement by federal agencies. According to USDA, federal agencies must assure within one year after the publication of the final rule that their procurement specifications require the preference of biobased products.

"We are very encouraged by the final rule and believe the program will have tremendous benefits and financial incentives for all those involved – from the crop producer to the manufacturer of the product to the seller," said CMPM Treasurer Clark Gerstacker, a corn producer from Midland and Chairman of the National Corn Growers Association Research and Business Development Action Team. "Products made from corn could potentially replace a variety of items produced from petroleum and aid in reducing the nation's dependence on foreign oil."

Federal government employees may soon be using biobased versus petroleum-based products for a variety of reasons. Ethanol is a homegrown, renewable fuel made from corn that could be used to fuel government fleets. Polylactic acid (PLA) is a 100 percent renewable corn-derived polymer that can be used to replace the petroleum in plastic products, including cups and cutlery.

"Since the U.S. produces 80 billion pounds of petroleum-based plastic annually, you can see how switching to a corn-based alternative would really put a dent in our dependence on foreign oil," said CMPM Executive Director Jody E. Pollok. "We applaud the federal government for setting this shining example for the rest of the country."

USDA is expected to begin issuing a series of proposed rules designating specific items for program eligibility that will extend over the next three years. According to USDA, the government has already identified 83 items on which it is developing test information to support designation by rulemaking. The text of the final rule is available at <http://www.biobased.oce.usda.gov/>.

Headquartered in DeWitt, CMPM is a legislatively established statewide program that utilizes one-cent per bushel of Michigan corn sold. Investments are made in the areas of research, education and market development in an effort to enhance the economic position of Michigan corn producers. CMPM works cooperatively with MCGA, a grassroots-membership association representing the state's corn producer's political interests.