

NEWS from the Catskill Watershed Corp

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CWC-sponsored grass pellet study concludes

MARGARETVILLE -- The Catskill Watershed Corp. (CWC) Board of Directors, at its July 1 meeting, received a final report on a six-year study of the effectiveness and efficiency of using grass pellets to heat homes and businesses.

The Grass Bio-Energy Feasibility Study was funded by the CWC's Catskill Fund for the Future. The report can be found on the Corporation's website, www.cwconline.org.

The Board heard from Mariane Kiraly, Core Agriculture Team Leader at Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Delaware County, which conducted the study at ten demonstration sites throughout the Watershed region.

The project began in 2008 to assess the practicability of using locally sourced grass as a heat source. Five outdoor furnaces and eight indoor pellet stoves were installed at municipal highway garages, retail stores, community and arts centers and at the CWC itself.

Pellets were produced by EnviroEnergy in Wells Bridge using field cuttings supplied by farmers and other landowners who supplemented their income while maintaining open space on their lands.

The grass pellets proved quite capable of warming large spaces with significant heat output. Their use in the region, where the grass was grown and pelletized, created a 'closed loop' energy system.

However, the higher ash content of grass compared to wood pellets, and certain corrosive compounds found in the grass, proved challenging for most of the stoves and boilers, and to their operators who spent more time than anticipated cleaning and maintaining the units.

Improving stove technology and grass harvesting methods may reduce these problems, Kiraly said.

She noted that grass pellets are still among the most economical fuel sources: #2 fuel oil, used by 43% of households in Delaware County, cost \$4.25 per gallon last winter, or \$36.96 per million BTUs of energy produced. This compared with \$225 per ton for grass pellets, or \$15.02 per million BTUs.

"In dollars, if each of the 8,642 households using fuel oil in Delaware County converted to grass biomass, this would represent an annual cost savings of approximately \$15.5 million in household energy costs, and a \$10.9 million industry for local grass biomass distributors," Kiraly explained.

The study also showed that burning grass pellets yields 81% less greenhouse gas emissions than does burning an equivalent amount of oil.

Wood pellets, used by many area households, compares favorably in price and emissions to grass pellets, but availability of the former was an issue during the past exceptionally cold winter.

Kiraly noted that the USEPA is doing further testing of grass types, equipment and other aspects of grass bio-energy in an effort to make it a more competitive choice in the world of renewable resources.

In addition to the CWC, participating demonstration sites included highway facilities in the Towns of Andes, Franklin, Hunter, and Jewett; Brookside Hardware, Margaretville; 4-H Camp Shankitunk, Delhi; The Catskill Center, Arkville; Pine Hill Community Center; and the Ashokan Center in Olivebridge.

CCE partners on the project included Dr. Jerry Cherney of Cornell University, Gerry Ruestow of Fermata Consulting, Fred Krone of GEMS and Linda Mosner of Rural Enterprise, in addition to the CWC.

For more information on the CWC and its many programs, visit www.cwconline.org, or call 845-586-1400.