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# Local News

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Posted on: Thursday, March 15, 2007

## Researchers to study local plants as biodiesel sources

By [Mike Leidemann](#)  
Advertiser Staff Writer

WAIMANALO — Some common local plants such as coconuts, avocados and kukui nuts could soon be doing double duty to fuel the cars we drive and the animals we eat as a result of a research project announced yesterday.

Federal and state officials said the goal of the new program is to continue developing alternative fuel sources for the state, which is heavily dependent on imported oil. But another aspect of the research will focus on using what's left over from the biodiesel fuel production to make feed for cattle, poultry and fish-farming operations in Hawai'i. Such feed now must be imported by the ton every day.

"The ultimate goal is to reduce Hawai'i's dependence on imported petroleum fuels and reducing diesel emissions," said Deborah Jordan, regional director of the federal Environmental Protection Agency's clean-air efforts. Jordan yesterday presented a \$100,000 check to officials at the Oceanic Institute, which will partner with other state and private organizations to do the research over the next year.

The researchers will also test palm oil, soy and castor beans to see which have the best scientific and marketing potential to produce an oil that can be converted through existing means into a fuel for diesel vehicles. Currently,



A kukui nut tree on the grounds of the Queen Emma Summer Palace. Kukui nuts may be turned into biodiesel fuel.

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about 3 percent of all diesel vehicles in the state are powered by biodiesel products, made almost exclusively from used cooking oil gathered from restaurants.

"It isn't a question of if we're going to increase that, it's when," said Kelly King, vice president of Pacific Biodiesel, the Maui-based company that has been a pioneer in the effort. The company's research effort under the Biodiesel from Fuel Crops in Hawai'i project will focus on finding which of the local products make the most efficient biodiesel fuel for vehicles and which ones can be grown most economically as biodiesel crops, King said.

Meanwhile, after the oil is extracted from the plants and processed, other scientists will take the leftover material and find ways to convert it into animal feed, said Warren Dominy, head of the Oceanic Institute's feed research program. With a proper production facility, Hawai'i could produce up to 50 tons of feed a day, eliminating the need for expensive imports and spurring new growth in animal husbandry and aquaculture businesses here, Dominy said.

"Feeds are the largest single cost in most animal production facilities. If we can use products grown in Hawai'i to produce low-cost feeds, it may substantially reduce costs to the farmer," said Bruce Anderson, Oceanic Institute president. "In addition, it will reduce or eliminate the amount of materials that would otherwise go to a landfill or be plowed into fields."

The project may also be important in preserving available agricultural land throughout the state by identifying profitable new uses for existing crops, officials said. The first research results from the project are expected to be available in less than a year, King said.

The project is led by the Honolulu Clean Cities group. Other partners include Aloha Green, Hawai'i Agricultural Research Center, University of Hawai'i-Hilo and Grace Pacific.

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