

43% of Brazil's Energy Comes from Renewable Sources

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Maranhão, a state in the Brazilian Northeast, will produce 60 thousand liters daily of diesel oil extracted from castor beans in a refinery that will be installed in São Luís, the state capital city, by the end of this year.

Maranhão's Governor José Reinaldo Tavares and the executive director of the Brasil Ecodiesel company, Nelson Côrtes da Silveira, signed a document yesterday for the construction of the refinery, which should commence oil extraction in July.

Daily production is expected to reach 90 thousand liters in order to meet foreign demand. The initial investment comes to US\$ 31 million (80 million reais).

In its initial phase, the project will benefit 2,500 families, and the goal is to involve approximately 12 thousand by 2008.

The project also expects to create at least 300 direct jobs and 1 thousand indirect ones. According to Brasil Ecodiesel, the refinery should begin operations in December.

At present Brazil consumes 36 billion liters of diesel oil per year. Production of vegetable oils, used in food preparation, amounts to 3.5 billion liters.

The Biodiesel Program

Brazil's National Biodiesel Program authorized, December 6, by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva through a Provisional Measure, introduced a new fuel in Brazil. The market should receive a product obtained from raw materials such as castor beans, soybeans, and dendé palm nuts.

With the Biodiesel Program, Brazil is initiating a new cycle in the energy sector and reinforcing incentives for the use of renewable energy sources and the diversification of the country's energy matrix.

Renewable sources currently represent 43.8% of the Brazilian matrix, compared with the global average of 13.6% and the developed countries' average of only 6%.

Biodiesel is a biodegradable fuel obtained from renewable sources such as vegetable oils and animal fats which, in the presence of a catalyst, react chemically with alcohol or methanol.

Various species of oilseed plants exist in Brazil that serve for the production of biodiesel: castor bean plants, dendé palms, sunflowers, babaçu palms, soybeans, and cotton.

In the National Biodiesel Program, the new fuel replaces in whole or in part diesel oil derived from petroleum in diesel engines used in trucks, tractors, pickups, and automobiles, as well as in the generation of energy and heat.

It can be used in its pure state or mixed with diesel in different proportions. A mixture containing 2% biodiesel is referred to as B2, and so on up to pure biodiesel, denominated B100.

The addition of 2% biodiesel to diesel oil derived from petroleum does not require any modifications in engines.

The motors that go on to use biodiesel mixed with diesel in this proportion will have their factory warranty assured by the National Association of Automotive Vehicle Manufacturers (ANFAVEA).

Translation: David Silberstein
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