

Phelps County at Center of Nebraska BioEconomy

Bioeconomy is a new buzzword in economic development, and Phelps County now stands at the epicenter of the movement with the recent announcement of the DG Fuels sustainable aviation fuel plant coming to the area.

“The Nebraska BioEconomy is simply about adding value to our agricultural products before they reach their end market,” said Julie Bushell, leader of the Nebraska BioEconomy initiative and founder of Global Sustainability Developers, LLC. “It means creating additional revenue streams for farmers and rural communities through value-added agriculture. By making our crops and livestock more versatile, we’re giving Nebraska’s economy new opportunities to grow.”



Julie Bushell

Bushell, who also serves as Gov. Jim Pillen’s Senior Advisor for Water and Energy, was appointed in May to lead the new Nebraska BioEconomy initiative.

“Nebraska deserves to lead the new economy, and the governor and I are dedicated to making it happen,” Bushell said. “We’ve got everything we need right here—people, water, crops, livestock. We’re at the forefront of sustainable agriculture, and now it’s time to leverage that. Our state’s long-

standing leadership in water management and agricultural practices positions us to deliver what the global economy is demanding.”

Nebraska BioEconomy Initiative

The Nebraska BioEconomy Initiative officially launched at the Governor’s Ag and Economic Development Summit in August in Kearney.

“The Nebraska BioEconomy is the key to elevating Nebraska’s economic capability, revitalizing our rural communities, protecting our family farms and ranches, spurring investment in our rural infrastructure, and transforming the products, services, technologies and production our country is demanding for a fully resilient future,” Bushell said.

Bushell has worked in agriculture, technology, and policy for more than 20 years. She enjoyed learning about water management and center-pivot irrigation while leading the water segment at Paige Electric, a Columbus-Nebraska-based company that provides connectivity solutions for agriculture, utility companies and other entities.

“Some of my favorite customers are in Phelps County,” she said. “It’s amazing to see those customers (center pivot dealers) and the impact they have on this project.”

Bushell said she’s always believed that measurable societal advancements are born in rural America.

“My career has been dedicated to developing solutions that will ensure the United States leads in agriculture and water conservation,” she said.

Bushell sees the Nebraska BioEconomy initiative as a means to strengthen family farms, grow the state’s infrastructure, and increase gross domestic revenue by billions.

“We’re not just talking about agriculture,” she said. “We’re talking about powering the future. Nebraska will provide renewable biogas, consumer goods, and even sustainable aviation fuel that airlines will require. The bioeconomy will touch every aspect of our lives, from the food we eat to the fuel that powers our planes.”

A Local Success Story: Phelps County

The announcement of DG Fuel’s SAF plant in Phelps County represents one of the many initiatives that showcase the state’s leadership in this movement.

“Nebraska will fuel the planes traveling around the globe because we can deliver the SAF that the airlines are requiring,” Bushell said. “Nebraska will be the very solution for consumer packaged goods and pharmaceuticals made from our crops, renewable biogas and power generation produced from our livestock, and we will amplify our story of the sustainable practices and water management leadership that got us all here.”

Bushell said The Nebraska BioEconomy is America’s “secret weapon” for food security and energy independence.

“I hope Phelps County is proud of the role they are playing in building a stronger, more secure nation,” she said. “The leadership and partnership of PCDC has made it happen.”

DG Fuels Will Create 650 Jobs

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about the project and gauge their interest in contracting with DG Fuels. The Phelps County facility will turn corn stover, which is the part of the corn plant left behind in the field after harvest, into aviation fuel.

DG Fuels’ Phelps County facility would collect 1.2 million tons of corn stover annually from a 75-mile radius, Tillery said. The stover (biomass) will be transported to the facility by a combination of carriers including farmers, owner/operators and company-owned vehicles.

Benefit to Local Economy

The Phelps County plant is expected to cost \$5 billion and create 650 permanent jobs with 330 of those jobs being professional or technical.

The plant will generate new local and state taxes, which will support local infrastructure and schools.

The plant is expected to be operational by 2030. More than 2,000 construction workers will be employed over the four-year construction schedule. Those workers will boost local spending on food, fuel and lodging.

Tillery said DG Fuels will commit significant resources as part of its Community Benefit Plan that is designed to address current needs and new challenges that result from this project.

“In Phelps County, early discussions have focused on infrastructure, high school education support, training, internships and community services,” Tillery said.

PCDC will conduct a public outreach forum to give community members an opportunity to give input on the benefits plan.

The exact Phelps County location for the project has not yet been announced.

“The site of the plan will be released after geotechnical and environmental studies have been completed and purchase agreements are in place,” Tillery said.

Tillery said the plant will not emit noxious or offensive odors. Its atmospheric emissions will amount to less than a hospital or large retail store.

DG Fuels and PCDC will collaborate on community outreach efforts and information sharing programs in the coming months.

“A project of this importance to the region will generate significant interest so it’s a project priority to collaborate closely with elected officials, civic leaders and other stakeholders to ensure timely and transparent communication,” Tillery said.