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News Release

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Alternative Jet Fuels Will Soon Be Sprouting at Metro Detroit's Airports

-- Airport Authority Partners with MSU Extension on Bioenergy Grant Project

Wayne County Airport Authority (WCAA), operator of **Detroit Metropolitan Airport** (DTW) and **Willow Run Airport** (YIP), has partnered with **Michigan State University (MSU) Extension Office** to grow, harvest and process bioenergy crops on airport-owned property. This strategic initiative—the first of its kind in the Midwest—represents WCAA's commitment to sustainable aviation in part through the promotion and development of aviation biofuels.

“How does aviation protect itself in the future against the depletion of fossil fuels and the uncertainty of foreign sources of energy?” asks **WCAA Interim CEO Genelle M. Allen**. “Part of the answer may be to grow it.”

The **AgriEnergy Technology Demonstration** project is supported by a \$476,000 grant awarded by the Michigan Energy Office of the **Michigan Economic Development Corporation**.

“WCAA has been interested in exploring the potential of developing airport-owned property around both airports for bioenergy production for some time,” said Allen. “If successful, this project could attract businesses to the vicinity of the airports that would produce alternative fuels for use in aircraft and other vehicles. This project has possibilities for not only bringing economic development to Southeast Michigan, but also protecting land around our airports from further encroachment.”

Together, DTW and YIP airports have approximately 1,700 acres of property that is potentially suitable for bioenergy cropping. As a participant in this project, WCAA has leased to MSU Extension three acres of airport-owned land on which biofuel crops have been planted and will soon be harvested, refined, and tested. The crops planted include canola and oriental mustard seed. MSU Extension will be responsible for the overall management of the project grant, while WCAA will provide access to and use of acreage at its airports for a portion of the project.

In addition to airport property, the grant also includes bioenergy sites on other types of land not traditionally used for growing biofuel crops such as vacant urban lots and highway right-of-ways.

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To ensure the integrity of this project, a stakeholders group with a diverse representation of the region and industry was formed and met in January to promote the use of biodiesel and jet fuel as an alternative fuel for aircraft and support equipment at DTW and YIP. In addition to staff from WCAA and MSU Extension Office, members of this stakeholder group include representatives from Delta Air Lines, Air Transport Association of America (ATA), Commercial Aviation Alternative Fuels Initiative (CAAFI), UOP Honeywell, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Wayne County EDGE Development Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, Synergy Consulting, Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Michigan Energy Office, The Power Alternative/Start Detroit (TPA), Genesee County Land Bank Authority, Mid Michigan Recycling, and Shell ServisAir.

“This grant provides Michigan an opportunity to transition into the green energy sector with the potential to reduce our dependence on foreign oil imports and create needed jobs,” said **MSU Extension Project Manager Dennis Pennington**. Pennington also expects that through this project will be able to determine the economic impact of growing, refining, storing, and transporting the biomass as a “drop in” fuel alternative (compatible with existing fuel systems).

Once refined, biodiesel can be dropped in current fuel tank farms at the airports without modification to the fuel system in any way. A processing plant could be constructed on or near the airport. The locally grown biofuel crops can then be harvested, transported to the refinery, and piped directly into the onsite airport fuel tanks. Current accessibility to rail lines and expressways also make it feasible to transport the product to other facilities.

“Wayne County EDGE and Aerotropolis Development Corporation have identified alternative energy and non-fossil fuels as a growth sector for our area,” said **Wayne County Executive Robert A. Ficano**. “Through this project, Wayne County will be at the forefront of an exciting, emerging, technology that could generate significant economic benefits for the region and State.”

“With airlines and ground support vehicles at DTW using more than one million gallons of jet fuel each day, it is both prudent and practical for WCAA to explore alternative means such as biofuels as a way to reduce the carbon footprint on the environment,” said **Rich Altman, Executive Director for Washington, D.C.-based Commercial Aviation Alternative Fuels Initiative (CAAFI)**, who serves as a member of the stakeholders group.

The project is expected to be completed by February 2012. For further information, contact MSU Extension’s Dennis Pennington, (269) 838-8264 or pennin34@msu.edu, or WCAA’s Michelle Plawecki at (734) 942-1503 or michelle.plawecki@wcaa.us.

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