

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

## **Rajburi avoids sugar spike with high tech**

### **B1bn plant can use molasses or cassava**

- Published: 7/10/2009 at 12:00 AM
- Newspaper section: [Business](#)

RATCHABURI : While many of Thailand's ethanol producers are suffering as global sugar prices trade at a 28% discount, Rajburi is shielded by technology that cuts its reliance on molasses, a byproduct of sugar milling.

While most Thai ethanol plants use Indian technology, the company invested 1 billion baht in United States technology that gives it flexibility in its raw materials and enables continuous production for 345 days per year.

"As well, we are able to use low-cost raw materials according to the availability of various types of supply by putting aside a supply of molasses from the sugar plant. Molasses can be stocked for one year," said the factory manager, Chaiyaporn Gitsivavet.

But chief executive Araya Arunanondchai has concerns about demand and whether costs may overhaul sales. Raw materials could also be insufficient for the growing number of ethanol plants, although Thai farmers have great potential to raise production, she added.

Rajburi Ethanol is the first ethanol plant in Ratchaburi province that can use molasses, cane juice or cassava as raw materials. Currently, the company uses molasses for four months and cassava for eight months of the year, depending on the availability of raw materials.

Rajburi Ethanol has provided a good model of the efficient use of resources since August 2008, said Energy Minister Wannarat Channukul.

"It is one business operator that falls in line with the government's 15-year policy, which includes the development of biofuels, which will substitute 460 billion baht in [crude oil] imports," Mr Wannarat said during visit to the plant.

The government finished the 15-year development plan for renewable and alternative fuels last year, following the 12-year plan (PDP) for the power sector. The plan is aimed at promoting renewable and alternative fuels and at cutting Thailand's dependence on fossil fuels.

Rajburi Ethanol produces 150,000 litres of ethanol per day and has an annual capacity of 54.75 million litres.

"We set a goal to produce more than 51 million litres of ethanol per year to supply all oil major companies such as Chevron," said Mr Chaiyaporn.

About 70% of the plant's raw material is cassava and 30% molasses, partly from the sugar mill of the parent company.

Rajburi Sugar also supplies waste water and solid waste for powering operations.

Excess waste materials are transformed into gas and then steam for generating electricity, which the company sells to the state of Thailand (Egat).

"We have been selling electricity to Egat for more than 10 years. Our biogas can cover up to about four months from buying 20,000 litres of fuel-oil a day. We can also use steam to serve our production," added Mr Chaiyap

Biogas from molasses and cassava produces 30,000 to 33,000 cubic metres of methane per day, which can subs year.

Likit Nimtrakul, managing director of Papop Co, the designer of Rajburi Ethanol's waste-water and biofuel syst production is to protect the environment and create reusable energy.

"With this kind of technology, Rajburi's production line is more flexible - if leftover waste from its parent's suga cassava will be used instead. By doing so, the production will never be interrupted," said Mr Likit.

Waste and water from the plant is also treated and distributed to farmers, who use it as fertiliser.

The Energy Minister said the ministry will be promoting ethanol used in gasohol to reach 9 million litres per day

Thailand's ethanol consumption is about 1.2 million litres per day, and will grow to 9 million litres in 15 years, s

"We will achieve the establishment of the Opec of biofuels. The Middle East is the Opec of fossil fuels, while A biofuels in the future," the minister said while meeting a group of cassava farmers in Ratchaburi province.

The energy minister pitched this idea to Asean counterparts at the recent Bangkok Biofuel 2009 seminar, saying export hub for biofuels and alternative energy.

## About the author

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