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CIRAS instrumental in launch of new biobased product label by USDA

AMES, Iowa – The U.S. Department of Agriculture is now making it easier for consumers to identify biobased products with the launch of the BioPreferred’s labeling program. Through a cooperative agreement with the USDA, Iowa State University Extension’s Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS) is identifying products that meet the definition of a biobased product and establishing their minimum biobased content for eligibility in the BioPreferred program.

Under the new voluntary program, manufacturers and vendors can, after obtaining certification from the USDA, market their certified biobased product using the “USDA Certified Biobased Product” label.

The role of CIRAS

CIRAS has been working with USDA to develop and implement the BioPreferred program since 2002. The program was established to help federal agencies give preference to biobased products when purchasing needed supplies. The role of CIRAS, as manager of the program, is to identify biobased products, investigate and analyze potential designation categories, provide industry perspective, and act as a conduit between businesses and government.

In support of the BioPreferred labeling program, CIRAS will develop support systems and programmatic policies to support operations; facilitate label usage applications from manufacturers, vendors, and industry associations; and contribute to the development and implementation of quality control and corrective action procedures to maintain a level of excellence expected of the USDA brand.

New marketing increases consumer awareness

“Today’s consumers are increasingly interested in making educated purchasing choices for their families,” said Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan. “This label will make those decisions easier by identifying products as biobased. Increasing the purchase of biobased products brings value to America by continuing to boost

The new USDA BioPreferred label for biobased products. Image courtesy of the USDA.

QUICK LOOK

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QUOTE

“Many companies offering biobased products are small, developing businesses, and bringing increased visibility to their products’ performance and environmental characteristics helps increase their sales and grow their business. The availability of the USDA Certified Biobased Product label better enables these companies to create new jobs in rural communities, as well as provide new markets for farm commodities and further help grow the biobased economy.”

Gerald A. Miller
demand for renewable commodities; by helping to secure our nation’s energy security; and by creating jobs, investment, and income.”

Manufacturers can now use the BioPreferred label to help customers identify their products as biobased. Currently, the USDA estimates that there are 20,000 commercially available biobased products created in the United States. These products are placed in approximately 200 categories, ranging from cleaning products to construction materials. While biobased products are widely available today, the new label will make these sustainable products more accessible and visible, as well as serve as a valuable marketing tool for the manufacturers and vendors of these products.

“Marketing is essential for companies to increase the visibility and sales of biobased products they offer. The availability of the USDA Certified Biobased Product label is an important step in this process, as it allows companies to better market these types of products,” said Gerald A. Miller, interim vice president for extension and outreach at Iowa State. “Many companies offering biobased products are small, developing businesses, and bringing increased visibility to their products’ performance and environmental characteristics helps increase their sales and grow their business. This better enables these companies to create new jobs in rural communities, as well as provide new markets for farm commodities and further help grow the biobased economy.”

Criteria for selection and certification

To be eligible for USDA certification and labeling, the USDA proposes that a product meet two criteria: (1) the product must be a biobased product; and (2) the biobased content of that product must be at or above its applicable minimum biobased content.

Biobased products are defined as commercial or industrial products (other than food or feed) that are composed in whole or in significant part of biological products or renewable domestic agricultural materials (including plant, animal, and marine materials) or forestry materials.

The minimum biobased content has been established under the USDA’s BioPreferred Federal Procurement Preference Program. Products that do not belong to designated items are still eligible if they are at least 25% biobased. The minimum biobased content for all items is subject to change. The USDA intends to increase the minimum biobased content over time as biobased product technologies advance.

About the BioPreferred Program

The USDA’s BioPreferred program was created by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill) as a preferred procurement program to increase the purchase and use of biobased products within the federal government. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) expanded the program’s scope to promote the sale of biobased products in other sectors.

BioPreferred is now composed of two programs: (1) a preferred procurement program for federal agencies; and (2) the new voluntary labeling program for the broad-scale marketing of biobased products.

Legislation directs federal agencies involved with the environment, transportation, and energy to act in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner. According to the order, agencies are required to purchase goods and services that use sustainable environmental practices, including biobased, environmentally preferable, energy- and water-efficient, and recycled-content products.