

Speaking Points

Honourable Greg Weadick
Minister of Advanced Education and Technology

3rd Annual
Biorefining Conversions Network Retreat

Rimrock Inn
300 Mountain Avenue
Banff, AB

Thursday, December 1, 2011

15 minutes

Introduction

- Thank you, David [*Dr. David Bressler, Director, Biorefining Conversions Network, and Associate Professor of Agricultural, Food and Nutritional Science, University of Alberta*] and good morning, everyone.
- I have to tell you...I'm in a really great mood this morning.
- Maybe it's the crisp mountain air. Maybe it's the incredible scenery.
- I can't tell you how many times I've been fortunate enough to find myself in this part of Alberta's Rocky Mountains...and I never tire of it.
- It re-energizes me. I'm sure those of you who've been here before feel the same way.
- And if this is your first visit to Canada's Rockies, I hope you find some time to explore a bit...it's well worth it.
- I want to commend David and his hard-working team at the Biorefining Conversions Network for choosing Banff as the location for this retreat...
...because it's an excellent embodiment of the bioeconomy opportunity that exists in Alberta.
- The clean air...
...the clean water...

...the forests that stretch for miles and miles...

...are all a perfect metaphor for the abundant natural resources that abound right across Alberta.

Alberta has...the Natural Resources

- We've got 21 million hectares of agricultural land in Alberta. That's a third of the province's total area.
- We've got 38 million hectares of forest land. That's 60% of the entire province.
- And yes...that adds up to over 90% of our land area...which shows you just how abundant our natural resources really are.
- But I think our most important natural resources is Albertans themselves.
- We've got a skilled workforce. We've got expertise. We've got innovative people who can take these abundant natural resources and do great things with them.
- As a result, Alberta has done very well.
- But we can't rest on our laurels and say, "Look how great we've done."
- We've got to think about those abundant natural resources in a new light.

- We've got to map out the future of Alberta's bioeconomy...and we've got to act to make that future come true.
- And the reason is simple. If we stop moving forward, it'll be the same as going backward.
- Because everyone around the world is trying to figure out how to move ahead and build their own bioeconomy.
- That means we need to be smart about how we build ours.
- With innovation, we can grow our traditional agriculture and forest industries to contribute much more.
- We can link these traditional sectors to energy...and other consumer and industrial manufacturing...within the context of a bioeconomy.
- In fact, I believe that we can build a bioeconomy that rivals anything found anywhere else in the world.
- Sure, Alberta's bioindustrial sector...I'm talking about the non-food and non-pharma part of the bioeconomy...is at a very early stage of growth.
- But its potential is staggering. Experts predict this burgeoning sector holds as much promise for Alberta as the oil sands did 60 years ago.
- The oil sands have been a success, because they combined three key ingredients...

...a natural resource...

... Albertans' innovative spirit...

...and world-class research and development.

- Just as we turned the oil sands from a dream to a reality, we're going to do the same as we build Alberta's bioeconomy.
- I know that we can grow our agricultural and forest sectors in an economically and environmentally sustainable way.
- I know that we can offer green products and green solutions to augment our petrochemical industry.
- I know that we can enhance rural development across the province through new jobs and globally competitive businesses.
- I know that we can do all of this. We just need a plan to take our bioeconomy to the next level...and then make it happen.

Alberta has...a Team Approach

- And that's exactly what Stan Blade and his team at Alberta Innovates – Bio Solutions are doing.
- They're working with key partners to develop a strategic plan to support the sector over the next 20 years.

- Now, I want to emphasize at this point the importance of the word “partners.”
- To get this right, the strategic plan for the bioeconomy definitely needs to be a team effort.
- And of course, one of those key partners is the Biorefining Conversions Network based at the University of Alberta...
 ...which our government supported in 2009 with an investment of \$3 million...
 ...and which is managed by Alberta Innovates – Bio Solutions.
- Even the name...Biorefining Conversions Network...emphasizes the importance of collaboration to reach our goal.
- The BCN’s job is to enable researchers in our agriculture, forest and bioindustries to collaborate with industry as they develop new products, reduce waste and add value to biomass feedstock.
- David and his team are working hard to facilitate such collaboration as they support research to develop new technologies that will promote the growth and advancement of Alberta’s bioindustrial sector.
- So far, the BCN’s research programs have leveraged over \$7 million with 17 projects currently in progress by more than 25 researchers.

- But to make our bioeconomy work, we also need partners outside the research community...with both industry and Alberta's rural communities.
- I'm talking about the towns...large and small...across the province who are closest to the feedstock...

...and who are interested in working with companies to make the most of the new bioindustrial technologies in their communities.
- To help them with their quest, our government...

...through a cross-ministry group called the Bioeconomy Alberta Team...

...is helping them build capacity and understand the opportunities associated with the developing bioeconomy.
- Drayton Valley and High Level are two communities that have certainly recognized such opportunities.
- While both communities were impacted by the downturn in the forest sector, they sought to change their fortunes by actively exploring bioindustrial options with companies.
- As a result, Drayton Valley established their "Bio-Mile" in 2008 as a cutting-edge bioindustrial cooperative...

...designed to provide a home to companies, organizations and R&D facilities with the goal of creating new products from forestry and agricultural biomass.

- The initiative has already brought four major industrial partners on board...

...including CLIB2021 [*pronounced “clib twenty twenty one”*], a European organization representing more than 75 research and industrial leaders interested in making products from clean, green and renewable natural fibres.

- In fact, I believe that Drayton Valley Town Councillor Dean Shular is in the audience this morning if you want to ask him later about their work in this area.
- Meanwhile, the town of High Level is also actively indentifying new bioeconomy opportunities.
- I understand that several technology provider companies are planning to develop in High Level due to the significant deciduous biomass availability in that area.
- Certainly, Drayton Valley and High Level recognize the potential benefits to their communities to be realized through the growing bioeconomy.
- I know that as they succeed, other communities across the province will be quick to follow in their footsteps.

Alberta has...a Committed Government

- At this point, I want to emphasize that the Government of Alberta is proud to be a part of the team working to build Alberta's bioeconomy.
- And in case you weren't already aware, I'm here to tell you that the political will to make it happen is very strong within our new government.
- Premier Redford recognizes the opportunity we have before us.
- Her commitment to the role of innovation in our future is undeniable.
- It's compelling.
- And it's contagious.
- She has declared...point blank...that Alberta equals opportunity...

...and she has confirmed that our government must do everything it can to promote this simple fact.

- In fact, in her first speech to the Legislature as Alberta's new Premier, she made the point of stating...and I'm quoting her directly again...

...“This government will go to the wall for Alberta's agricultural sector”...

- Then...just last month when she spoke to the Economic Club of Canada in Toronto...she stated categorically that...

... “Greening our energy is critical on a global scale. More than ever, consumers are demanding environmentally responsible products”...

- All of this underscores our government’s support in moving Alberta’s bioeconomy forward.
- More and more, bio innovations are coming to the fore that can “green” our economy... including our energy economy.
- Take BCN for example. They’ve just discovered how to make plastic from the throw-away parts of an animal carcass. They also have the world’s only patent for making jet fuel from animal tallow.
- There’s also Al-Pac...one of Alberta’s innovative pulp mills...which will soon become a commercial supplier of not only pulp, but also methanol, which is commonly used in products like antifreeze, paint remover and ink.
- And there’s Alberta Innovates – Bio Solutions...which has just started working with the Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation to identify biological-based projects that can both significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and add revenue to our agricultural and forest sectors.
- Premier Redford knows we need to develop our opportunities, making good use of our natural assets in agriculture and forestry.

- In fact, her mandate to me specifically calls for more capacity for agriculture and energy research...which will translate into even more opportunity for our bioeconomy.
- I'm going to quote the Premier one more time...because I want you to understand how she's going to make our bioeconomy a reality.
- She said...

... "Albertans themselves are best equipped to guarantee this province's prosperity. The government's job is to create the conditions to let them do so, and then get out of the way."

- So that's what we're doing.
- We've been getting stepping stones in place to help you succeed.
- That's why we supported the creation of the BCN.
- That's why we created facilities like the Alberta Biomaterials Development Centre.
- That's why we work with progressive communities like Drayton Valley and High Level...

...people who want to make the most of new biorefining opportunities in their area with an "in-my-backyard" attitude.

- And that's one of the reasons why we created Alberta Innovates...
...so we could enable people...like the immensely talented individuals in the panel who'll be up next...to do what they do best...innovate.
- The bottom line is this. We've got all the elements we need to make Alberta's bioeconomy one of the top players in the world.
- We've got the natural resources...which includes innovative people. We've got the team approach. We've got the political will.
- We can make it happen...and we will make it happen.

Conclusion

- Just one more point, then I'll turn things over to Stan and his panel.
- When David and his team set out to promote this retreat, they put forward a series of really intriguing questions.
- Questions like...

...what will Alberta's bioindustrial sector look like...and where will it fit within the global bioeconomy?

... what technologies will be widely employed...and what products will dominate the market?

- Those questions were meant to spark your imagination...to start the dialogue for this retreat.
- I'm not here to answer those questions.
- I'm here to tell you that our government is creating the environment in which Alberta's best and brightest can answer those questions for us...
 ...and we can then get out of the way so they can do their job and make those answers come to life
- And that's where the expert panel of gentlemen next comes in.
- They represent three of our Alberta Innovates corporations.
- And that means they're working to find the most innovative ways to develop our bioeconomy.
- I can't wait to hear what they have to say this morning...
 ...because the work they do today will help us achieve the Alberta we want tomorrow.
- But make no mistake...Stan and Surindar and Richard aren't doing it alone.
- Your participation and contributions over the next three days will also be necessary to help make the strategic plan a reality.

- On that note, I want to wish you a very productive retreat.
- Thank you.

- END -