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Agreement settles Sparta ethanol plant controversy
 By STEVE CAHALAN | La Crosse Tribune

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TOP HOMES

SPARTA, Wis. — Century Foods International will buy the proposed 83.7-acre Sparta ethanol plant site from Coulee Area Renewable Energy LLC.

CARE will not build an ethanol plant within three miles of Century Foods' Sparta plants. And all lawsuits filed during the yearlong fight over the proposed site will be dismissed.

Those are highlights of a 15-page settlement agreement the Sparta City Council approved Tuesday night.

Besides the city, Century Foods and parent company Hormel Foods Corp., CARE and Friends of Sparta — a citizens group that opposed the proposed Sparta ethanol plant — are parties to the agreement as well. All of the parties were plaintiffs and/or defendants in lawsuits over the site.

ADVERTISING INFORMATION

CARE President Dave Rundahl declined to comment Tuesday on the agreement, or on whether his group still plans to build an ethanol plant at another location. He did say CARE still has an option to buy land near Bangor, Wis.

In December, CARE filed a lawsuit in Monroe County Circuit Court that claimed Century Foods and Hormel breached terms of an October settlement that called for Century Foods to buy CARE's Sparta site at an agreed price. The lawsuit said the two companies breached the agreement by insisting on a new condition — that CARE board members agree not to allow an ethanol plant on land they personally own.

In the December lawsuit, CARE asked that Century Foods be required to buy the Sparta site under the terms in the settlement agreement. The site is near Century Foods' largest Sparta plant.

In its answer to the lawsuit, Century Foods said the October settlement memorandum was a non-binding "agreement to agree" and was subject to conditions that never occurred.

Under Tuesday's agreement, Century Foods will pay \$2.5 million for the Sparta land and for other rights.

Century Foods President Tom Miskowski declined to comment Tuesday on the agreement.


Friends of Sparta President Dan Fanning said he has been advised not to comment on the agreement itself, but added, "Needless to say, we are overjoyed this has been settled."

Century Foods representatives had argued emissions from the ethanol plant would contaminate its milk-based products, while Friends of Sparta and some other residents raised issues such as potential odor problems. The farmers and other investors in CARE disputed those claims.


Plans for the Sparta ethanol plant first were announced at an informational meeting CARE held in March 2006 in Bangor. But opposition to the proposed site began surfacing early last year, when the project came before the City Council.

Market conditions for ethanol plants have gone downhill since the project was first announced. Cargill Inc. said in late

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February it has suspended plans to build a \$200 million ethanol plant outside Topeka, Kan.

Jay O'Neil, a senior agricultural economist at Kansas State University, said escalating grain prices were making it difficult for ethanol plants to make a profit.

Steve Cahalan can be reached at (608) 791-8229 or scahalana@lacrossetribune.com. The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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Comments >>**farmr4u**

wrote on Mar 20, 2008 8:49 AM:

" If corn for food is that important, why was it priced so low for so long? "

Sonny

wrote on Mar 20, 2008 8:05 AM:

" Let's see...one plant makes food items, the other fuel. Mmmm...I think I'll take the food items. "

The Moderate

wrote on Mar 20, 2008 4:15 AM:

" Do you people who are so "against" an ethanol plant have any idea what Hormel actually produces at that Plant? I doubt that if you did that you would think it was any better than ethanol. What I missed was Tom Miskowski, the guy who has his finger on the pulse of Sparta, didn't tell us what a great day this was for "his people", the citizens of Sparta. "

random annoying bozo

wrote on Mar 19, 2008 4:10 PM:

" there is a very bright side to this whole 'debacle'. hopefully it has eductated some people on the utter foolishness of 'growing' our energy. but then again, government seems to be fully behind the concept, so i guess there will be many more brain flatulances to come. and as usual, 'the People' are left to clean up governments messes. "

free_speech

wrote on Mar 19, 2008 2:10 PM:

" They should build a jail just for Sparta there. "

Mack

wrote on Mar 19, 2008 9:52 AM:

" There's a lot of dumb money pouring into ethanol. Too bad it is the developers and builders are the only winners here. "

PHIL OSIFER

wrote on Mar 19, 2008 8:48 AM:

" "Overjoyed at the settlement". Overjoyed, would be if the plant were not going in at all. At the bottom of the article it points out that "market conditions have gone downhill". One plant has been stopped and the cost to make it is uneconomical "

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