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## USDA Secretary, others gather at biofuel site to monitor construction

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### Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack tours INEOS



U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack visits the INEOS New Planet Bioenergy plant under construction at Oslo Road and 77th Avenue.  
Staff Photo: Keith Carson

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**Keith Carson**

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and other local officials gathered at the new BioEnergy Center to see how the former Ocean Spray factory site is becoming the place where advanced biofuel will be created.

Sec. Vilsack, who held a private briefing with INEOS New Planet BioEnergy officials before speaking publicly outside the main office, said that the biofuel facility is a key to fulfilling President Barack Obama's vision of cutting America's dependence on foreign oil.

"We need to be able to do a better job," Vilsack said of what President Obama has asked - making use of America's own resources. "It's about that renewable energy."

The USDA has given a conditional commitment to the biofuel refinery project for a \$75 million loan guarantee, which is undergoing the last steps to be being approved. The US Department of Energy has also committed \$50 million to the project.

The State of Florida has ponied up \$2.5 million. Locally, Indian River County Commissioners have approved a jobs grant for the plant at nearly \$300,000.

The factory is located at 925 77th Ave. SW, southwest of Oslo Road and 77th Avenue SW.

INEOS New Planet BioEnergy's refinery uses bacteria to break down plant material, convert the waste into gasses and convert the gas into ethanol. The bacteria do not need a food crop - such as corn - to produce the fuel, according to biofuel officials. The process, instead, can use material from construction waste, municipal solid waste, and forestry and agricultural waste.

Commissioner Wesley Davis has a history with the old Ocean Spray site, being a former Ocean Spray grower. Looking over the site now under construction, he said there is little of the old factory that remains - the main office, the scales, and an old building at the far end of the property.

"Agriculture has transformed from one commodity to another," Davis said, noting that it has always evolved and INEOS is the latest evolution.

"To see the way citrus faded the way it did," he said, "that hurts."

Davis said he would like to see citrus remain and agriculture to expand to growing crops for the ethanol plant.

"It's really exciting," Indian River Chamber of Commerce President Penny Chandler said of having the biofuel refinery here. "They could be anywhere in the world and they chose here."

She said the county had worked with the bioenergy firm since the early 2000s to bring the facility to Indian River County.

"You don't know how long it's going to take," Chandler said.

With the exposure the facility is getting from the high-visibility visits - such as that of Secretary Vilsack - and coverage in trade magazines, Chandler said other green energy firms have expressed interest in Indian River County.

A visit from the USDA secretary extends the list of high profile people who have stopped in Indian River County for businesses.

"This just adds to the credentials," Chandler said.

Commissioner Davis agreed.

"It speaks volumes," he said of receiving the visit. "It's indicative of the project we have going on here."

Article can be found at [http://www.veronews.com/news/indian\\_river\\_county/government/usda-secretary-others-gather-at-biofuel-site-to-monitor-construction/article\\_a135cef4-c4e1-11e0-ae7a-001a4bcf6878.html](http://www.veronews.com/news/indian_river_county/government/usda-secretary-others-gather-at-biofuel-site-to-monitor-construction/article_a135cef4-c4e1-11e0-ae7a-001a4bcf6878.html)