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Commodities

16-31 May 2009

PARC, KIJANI energy of Canada sign MOU for cultivation, production of jatropha seeds as biofuel

Islamabad: Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC), the apex agricultural research organization of the country and Kijani Energy (KE), a sustainable energy company of Canada have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to focus on the development of large-scale cultivation of *Jatropha Curcas L* (*Jatropha*), which is an environmentally and cost-effective source of biodiesel.

The MoU was signed by Dr. Zafar Altaf, Chairman, PARC and Junaid Mirza, Vice President KE in a simple ceremony here. Dr. Shahid Ahmad, Member Natural Resources Division; Dr. Muhammad Munir, Member Plant Sciences Division and Dr. Khalid Mehmood, PSO witnessed the signing of the MoU.

Under the agreement PARC and KE would jointly work for the promotion of *Jatropha* cultivation to develop bio-fuel culture in Pakistan; to undertake *Jatropha* cultivation in mass scale, to investigate the potential of *Jatropha*, including on marginal and semi-marginal lands with the consideration that such areas should not have been used for food agriculture in the last five year period, and educate farmers and industry with the benefits of growing and processing *Jatropha*.

Highlighting the objectives of the MoU Dr. Zafar Altaf said that Pakistan was facing serious energy crisis, meeting its energy and transport requirements by importing fuel. He said Pakistan spent US\$ 3.1 billion on the import of petroleum products. "These imports account for almost 85% of Pakistan's total consumption of fuel and almost one-third of Pakistan's trade deficit," he maintained. He said by introducing *Jatropha* as biofuel the country could save as much as US\$ 150 million in foreign exchange for every hectares of *Jatropha* cultivated in Pakistan.

Expressing his views, Junaid Mirza of KE Canada said that his company would invest US\$ 150 million during the next five years for cultivation and production of *Jatropha* as a source of biofuel. He said that feasibility reports of Cholistan and Thar areas have been conducted and found ideal locations for cultivation of *Jatropha*. He said the areas identified are mostly not being used for food agriculture.

"In Pakistan, Kijani Energy is focused on building an integrated biodiesel company dedicated to enhancing energy security and promoting local economic development," he maintained and added: "The Company intends to build an oil extraction facility and a power generation plant, using the seed paste produced by the oil extraction facility during the period 2010-12, based on the cultivation of about 200,000 acres of *Jatropha* starting in 2009."

It may be recalled that *Jatropha* (botanical name *Jatropha Curcas L*) is considered the best source of biofuel among the various plant based fuel resources. It is a drought-resistant, hardy bush of two-three metres that is notable for its ability to grow in poor soils and with rainfall as low as 250 millimetres per year.

A low-input crop, the plant has been in use for many centuries across Latin America, Africa and Asia as a natural hedge for medicinal uses. *Jatropha* seeds are non-edible, and due to its ability to grow on marginal land, the plant does not compete with food crops for acreage, making it superior choice to first-generation biofuels that are largely criticized for contributing to the increase of food prices.

Jatropha oil, which is pressed from seeds collected from the plant, could be used on its own to power diesel generators and cars, or it could be further processed to into environmentally safe and cost-effective biodiesel. Besides, its another by-product - a seed paste - could also be used as an excellent organic fertilizer or as a fuel in power generating.

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