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Growth Energy asks EPA to OK job-creating 15% ethanol blend

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On Friday, pro-ethanol Growth Energy formally requested the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to raise the “decades-old, arbitrary limit” for blending ethanol with gasoline from the current 10 percent (E10) up to 15 percent (E15).

Growth Energy co-chair General Wesley Clark announced the formal submission of a “green jobs” waiver at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. During his remarks, General Clark noted that increasing the blend up to E15 would create 136,101 new jobs and inject \$24.4 billion into the American economy annually. Growth Energy released a report Wednesday on the positive economic impact of higher blends of ethanol. The report is available at: www.GrowthEnergy.org

“Increasing the ethanol blend up to E15 is a common sense solution to our economic, energy, and environmental challenges. Thirty years ago, the EPA allowed the 10 percent blend based on much less scientific evidence than we have today, and we now have years of driving experience showing that our cars’ performance is not affected,” said General Clark. “Raising the cap up to E15 is supported by sound science. If the EPA acts swiftly, a higher blend of ethanol will help us jumpstart the economy while further reducing our dependence on foreign oil. I hope the EPA will approve this request expeditiously.”

General Clark also welcomed the opportunity to work with the USDA and EPA on efforts to provide short-term relief through a substantially similar waiver for E12 or E13. The EPA may use any of the data Growth Energy provided in its “green jobs” waiver application to support an immediate move while studying the merits and data on a move up to E15 within the 270 day timeframe.

“As a fuel systems expert with nearly 30 years of experience in the automotive industry, I can state with confidence that research-approved E15 is completely acceptable for use in our cars,” said Michael Harrigan, former Ford engineer and independent automotive consultant. “Vehicle fuel systems have been upgraded over the last 30 years to meet U.S. regulations by rigorous testing against aggressive laboratory test fuels. These upgrades began in the ‘80s which makes virtually all of the U.S. legacy fleet fully capable of handling this relatively small change in marketplace fuel.”

To approve the higher ethanol blend request, the EPA only needs to determine that ethanol blends up to 15 percent will not affect the emission control systems in vehicles. In his speech, General Clark said that Growth Energy made the request to raise the cap based on multiple sources of scientific data showing that E15 has no adverse effects on a car's performance, maintenance, or emissions controls. In fact, a study by the Department of Energy concluded that when E15 was compared to traditional gasoline, there were no significant changes in vehicle tailpipe emissions or vehicle drivability as ethanol content increased. General Clark also mentioned that the waiver request would not impact small engines since gas stations would still be able to sell lower blends of ethanol, including gasoline with zero ethanol (E0).

In the study released by Growth Energy earlier this week, it found that another 6 billion gallons of ethanol production capacity would need to be built in order to meet the demand for ethanol at a 15 percent blend rate. In addition to the annual employment and economic contribution of the additional production, the construction of these new facilities would lead to a one-time economic boost of \$36.8 billion and create more than 260,000 new construction-related jobs. In addition to the economic benefits, increasing the blend rate up to E15 would avoid the importation of seven billion gallons of foreign oil each year, reduce greenhouse gas emissions equal to removing 10.5 million vehicles from the road, and create a market for second-generation biofuels.

Increasing the blend of ethanol is also an important bridge toward future biofuels' advances. "Moving to higher ethanol blends will help build on the foundation established by today's ethanol to ensure a viable market for tomorrow's advanced ethanol that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 86 percent compared to gasoline," said Vinod Khosla, biofuels investor and founder of Khosla Ventures. "But until we increase the cap, there will be no market for these breakthrough fuels."