

The Environmental Protection Agency has extended its approval of fuel blends up to E15—up to 15 percent ethanol—for cars and light trucks made between 2001 and 2006, a move welcomed by the Nebraska Corn Board.

The announcement follows EPA's approval of ethanol blends of up to E15 for vehicles 2007 and newer last fall. Both approvals came after EPA and the U.S. Department of Energy performed their own research into the use of E15.

"Higher ethanol blends like E15 will support the ethanol industry, which is reaching market saturation at E10, and help the United States continue down the path of utilizing more clean burning renewable fuels that are made in America," said Kelly Brunkhorst, director of research for the Nebraska Corn Board. "We are pleased to see EPA's research clearly demonstrate that E15 is an outstanding fuel for more than 120 million vehicles on the road today and that it followed that research in making the approval."

A request to allow the use of ethanol blends up to E15 was filed in 2009. More than 5,000 Nebraskans filed comments with EPA in support of the waiver request.

While EPA approval was critical, Brunkhorst said it will take time before E15 will be available at the pump.

"Additional regulatory loose ends and certifications still need to be completed, but we are hoping to see E15 later this year at stations across Nebraska," said Tim Scheer, a member of the Nebraska Corn Board who farms near St. Paul. "Since Nebraska is the second-largest ethanol producing state in the country, the adoption of E15 will allow Nebraskans to use more of the home-grown fuel that supports jobs right here in the state and across the country."

Scheer is also a member of the National Corn Growers Association's ethanol committee.

In the meantime, the Nebraska Corn Board continues to offer grants to support fueling station owners who would like to install blender pumps and start offering higher ethanol blends to motorists who drive flex fuel vehicles.

Several new blender pump sites have come online in the last few months and more are on the way.

"Blender pumps allow station owners to offer more fuel options for motorists, from E10 for regular vehicles to E30 and E85 for flex fuel vehicles," Brunkhorst said. "Blender pumps will also allow station owners to easily offer both E10 and E15 fuel options when the time is right to do so."

E15 and blender pumps will help the United States reduce its dependence on foreign oil and utilize cleaner, renewable fuels, goals set out as part of the renewable fuels standard (RFS), the Nebraska Corn Board said.

Established through the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, the RFS increases the amount of renewable fuels available in the fuel supply each year.

In 2011, corn-based ethanol will make up a minimum of 12.6 billion gallons as part of the RFS, up from 12.0 billion in 2010. By 2022, the RFS requires 36 billion gallons of renewable fuels from all sources to be blended into the fuel supply.

"Higher ethanol blends like E15, more flex fuel vehicles and blender pumps are necessary to meet that goal and diversify our fuel supply," Scheer said.