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Secretary Gassman Announces Grow Grant to Train Skilled Workers for Bio-Tech Cluster, Renewable Fuels Industry in Western Wisconsin

In Boyceville, Labor Secretary awards \$85,000, one of 10 grants in \$850,000 initiative

BOYCEVILLE – As part of Governor Doyle's \$850,000 Emerging Industries Skills Partnership initiative, Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today announced an \$85,000 grant to Workforce Resource, Inc., funding that will train up to 135 workers in the biotech and renewable energy cluster of west central Wisconsin.

Governor Doyle made the Emerging Industries Skills Partnership (EISP) part of his ***Grow Wisconsin – The Next Steps*** strategy for economic and workforce development. The grant that Secretary Gassman announced on his behalf will leverage additional resources, providing total funding of \$135,000 for the region's Bio-Connect Project.

"The demand for renewable fuels is increasing, and with it, the need for skilled workers in our emerging biofuels industry," Secretary Gassman said. "The west central region has two of the seven ethanol plants in Wisconsin. This grant will provide them and others engaged in related agri-business enterprises the skilled workers they need. This is just one of the strategic investments Governor Doyle is making now so that our economy will continue to grow and create jobs in the years ahead."

The grant is one of 10 being awarded under Governor's \$850,000 EISP initiative, providing new and incumbent workers with the necessary skills and meet workforce demands in advanced manufacturing, biotechnology and renewable energy.

Secretary Gassman announced the grant during a visit to Western Wisconsin Energy (WWE), LLC, a locally owned ethanol plant in Boyceville. With a \$45,000 renewable fuels grant from Governor Doyle in 2006, the WWE plant opened in September of 2006 and now produces 45 million gallons of ethanol annually. Last month, WWE began supplying area retailers with E85 produced from locally grown corn.

Workforce Resource will manage the project, on behalf of the West Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board. Its partners include the Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) and University of Wisconsin-Stout Northwest Wisconsin Manufacturing Outreach Center (NWMOC).

As outlined by Secretary Gassman, the grant will enable Workforce Resource and its partners to:

- Establish a Bio-Fuel/Bio-Tech Cluster Team to assess the needs of employers, determine skill sets new and current workers require, and address their needs;
- Train 15 new and 30 incumbent workers within the Bio-Cluster, by adapting Wisconsin Technical College System curriculum to meet their training needs, and by developing career pathways;
- Provide training in LEAN/Green principles for 75 to 90 high wage workers at WWE and two other employers in the cluster, and with the help of NWMOC, measure improvements in productivity.

- more -

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Accepting the grant from Secretary Gassman was Richard Best, Executive Director of Workforce Resource. Joining them were Senator Pat Kreitlow of Chippewa Falls, CVTC President Bruce Barker and Robert Meyer, Director of UW-Stout NWMOC.

WWE General Manager Steve Christensen said the project would provide training for 30 of his employees. In a letter supporting the grant application, he said, "Developing a skilled workforce is essential in filling jobs and retaining employees for positions within our company and the biotechnology industry in general. Recruiting and hiring trained employees in the biotechnology sector is a challenge and we find the goals of the proposal to be parallel to our company's hiring needs."

Besides WWE, the project includes Ace Ethanol in Stanley and Ardisam, a bio-diesel plant in Cumberland. In seeking the grant, Dick Best of Workforce Resource said the project also would serve other agri-business enterprises in the region's nine counties: Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin, Pierce, Polk and St. Croix.