



## Quincy sunflowers may bring new fuel

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Diesel alternative  
finds potential in  
Basin site

QUINCY -- Dwarf  
sunflowers, in a  
field far from the  
highway between  
George and  
Quincy, reach up  
to visitors' waists,  
and sometimes a  
little beyond.

Ion Manea, a  
former J.R.  
Simplot plant  
engineer, was  
well aware of the  
area, and thought  
it might be a good  
possible site for  
his venture:  
growing the  
hybrid flowers for  
their seed, to  
produce a fuel  
that may answer  
farming  
difficulties and  
rising costs of  
fuel.

"This is a greener  
product than



biodiesel," he said. "This is a just natural processing,



pressing, doing some filtration and adding some natural additives to it. Other than that, it's a very pure product, it's a vegetable oil cooking product. But it has a special chemical structure because the plant is special -- the seed."

The fuel, called AgroFuel, is geared toward local growth, use and distribution, Manea said, envisioning a distribution network.

Manea's Fuel Farm Cooperative Association is designed to help farming cooperatives form or expand, while Kent-based Flower Power USA is developing the technology, crusher and supplies for the cooperatives.

The meal from the sunflower seeds can be used as a feed supplement, Manea said, pointing to a high protein and fiber values. Because there's not a severe extraction process, further value is added, he said.

When he selected various sites around the state, Manea was looking for places that were most best growing areas in the state.

"This place can allow the plant to experience the maximum genetic potential," he said. Quincy has excellent soil drainage, irrigation and sunlight exposure. "This is a very resilient plant. It's a weed actually, and once taking off, no other weeds can catch up."

Looking into the possibility of planting the flowers in George and researching the local permitting process, Manea called George Mayor Elliot Kooy in June. Kooy knew of several acres in the immediate area Manea could use to test the flowers, and made the arrangements, although there were some concerns that the seeds were planted too late in the year.

"(The) Quincy site was planted late, a couple months late, and it's already catching up," Manea said. "You have plenty of sunlight, plenty of irrigation. This is the most potential right here."

"I don't know all the potential for the things, I just thought it was an interesting project," Kooy said. "We had the space for it, it wasn't going to cost us a lot of money and it would be interesting to see what happened with the whole thing."

Kooy noted that several beekeepers have set up hives near the sunflower site.

Manea also has seeds plotted elsewhere in the state, in Mount Vernon, Pasco, Walla Walla, Buckley and Enumclaw, for testing yields and gathering agronomical data to develop a brochure on how to grow them.

The flowers are specially bred for oil, and phase one of the project is to determine how the crops grow.

Manea plans to begin in a mobile unit which would have presses of varying sizes, and visiting the farmers growing and storing the seeds.

He is working to create government financing for the project through grants for renewable energy and value-added projects. Manea hopes to talk with politicians to modify laws to recognize the fuel's benefits, although the majority of his discussions have been with farmers thus far.