



Farm groups query preem

Want ethanol remarks clarified

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By JONATHAN JENKINS

Farm groups demanded an explanation from Premier Dalton McGuinty yesterday after he suggested the province may rethink its promise to mandate 10% ethanol content in all gasoline by 2010.

"We are seeking clarification from the Premier that he remains committed to the Ontario biofuels strategy, as we all work together for a healthy environment and robust economy in this province," Leo Guilbealt, chairman of the Ontario Soybean Growers, said in a press release.

GLOBAL HUNGER

McGuinty mused Wednesday he would be "revisiting" the 10% pledge in light of growing concern ethanol production is diverting too much land from food production and contributing to global hunger. Critics have also charged the fuel made from corn and other grains isn't helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"Premier McGuinty helped farms across Ontario with his decisive leadership on biofuels and the ethanol mandate. Biofuels have created new manufacturing jobs and new growth in rural Ontario," Geri Kamenz, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, said.

"Affirmation of the Premier's continued support of biofuels and the ethanol mandate is necessary to reassure farmers and biofuel investors in Ontario."

'CRUCIAL'

But Bliss Baker, an executive with a major producer in Ontario, said there wouldn't be an ethanol industry in Ontario without the government's support and Wednesday's remarks from the Premier are unlikely to change much.

"Our company and one of our competitors are world leaders in next generation biofuels," Baker, v-p of Greenfield ethanol, said.

"There is no way we would be in this position without the support of the provincial government, without their policy support, their financial support and their leadership.

"It's crucial."

Baker said he wasn't sure what all the fuss was about, saying he felt government should continually review its decisions, especially when taxpayers' money is at stake.

He also said he was confident any review of ethanol would find the grain-based fuel vindicated.

"It's utter nonsense," Baker said, pointing out that ethanol is using 1% of the 15 million acres of land under cultivation globally.