Renewable energy symposium

Program highlights emerging alternative energy technologies and potential for development in Southeast Colorado.

By ANTHONY A. MESTAS
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

LA JUNTA — With oil and gasoline prices still at their highest levels in 15 years and demand for fossil-fuel energy surging, citizens in Southeastern Colorado are looking to find a cure for the nation's energy woes.

That prospect was showcased with a dazzling array of alternative energy ideas presented Friday during the "Fueling America through Rural American Renewable Energy" symposium, hosted by La Junta Economic Development Alliance and the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade.

The four-hour symposium focused attention on emerging alternative energy technologies and what that means for business, education and communities in Southeast Colorado.

Scientists from the U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden and Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque presented information to about 80 people gathered at Otero Junior College in the Ed Stafford Theatre Friday.


Peter Doyle

There were also speakers from Gov. Bill Owen's office of Energy Management and Conservation and a hydroponic consultant from Australia.

The symposium was intended to educate public officials, business owners, entrepreneurs, the agricultural community, college students and professors and the public about important trends in renewable energy development in rural areas.

Much of Friday's meeting was dedicated to hydroponic methods of growing crops.

Australia, for all its agricultural bounty, is a land all too frequently ravaged by drought, flood and fire.

Peter Doyle, a commercial hydroponic consultant from Australia, gave a presentation on hydroponics, the cultivation of plants in a nutrient solution rather than in soil. Doyle is creating nutritious fodder for livestock using hydroponics methods in Australia.

Known as the "God Fodder" of hydroponics, Doyle has designed several hydroponic systems and says water problems are a global issue.

"We have to change the methods of farming and we have to change our method of thinking on how we approach the future — we can't do things the way we used to; we have to be open to new ideas," Doyle said.

Doyle said that it takes about 37,900 liters of water to produce $100 worth of vegetables and fruit.

"Through hydroponics it can take as little as 600 liters of water to produce $100 worth," Doyle said.

Timo ter Voort, a hydroponics expert from the Netherlands, said people have to go back to the basics.

"Healthy methods, healthy crops, healthy people, that's what it's all about," he said.

Voort said that there is a huge misuse of water by agriculture in his country similar to the problem in the United States.

An audience member asked if hydroponics can be used to grow crops used to make ethanol and biofuels.

"It works wonderful with sunflowers. They grow quick