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## Energy company opens U.S. headquarters in Bowie

### Swedish firm specializes in converting manure into power

by Sarah Richards | Staff Writer

As the president of a company that converts manure into energy, Mattias Lindgren has heard just about every joke there is about cow pies and horse patties.

Now, it looks like Lindgren will have the last laugh.

On Feb. 23, Swebo Bioenergy International was awarded a \$477,857 grant from the Maryland Energy Administration. The grant, which is funded by federal stimulus money, is part of the Clean Energy Economic Development Initiative meant to create both jobs and clean energy in Maryland.

The grant comes just days after Swebo, a Swedish bioenergy company, signed a lease for 2,500 square feet of office space on Tesla Drive in Bowie.

"We're in the process of getting signs up and furniture moved in," Lindgren said from his company's headquarters in MoIndal, Sweden.

Lindgren said Swebo's Bowie office will be the company's North American headquarters and will employ six Marylanders by the end of 2010. He said the company chose Bowie because of its proximity to several major cities and airports.

The grant money will be used to build a facility that uses manure to heat water and to generate electricity. Lindgren said the company was considering several locations in Maryland, but would not be more specific.

Founded in 1976, Swebo manufactures equipment that produces energy from biological materials like manure and wood. The company also builds and sells facilities to produce the energy. Lindgren said most of the energy that Swebo products produce heats commercial complexes, such as hospitals and schools.

Rob Burk, the executive director of the Maryland Horse Industry Board, which is part of the Maryland Department of Agriculture, said state officials have been working with Swebo since last fall on identifying a location for the processing facility.

Burk said the Show Place Arena and Prince George's Equestrian Center are being considered as one possible location.

With approximately 100,000 horses in Maryland, Swebo's bio-burners could find a market for use. There are more horses per square mile here than any other state, according to the board, and with each adult horse producing 50 pounds of waste per day, the never-ending manure supply is a "big problem," Burk said.

Tracks like the Bowie Training Center frequently end up selling their manure and shaved wood chips used for bedding to Pennsylvania mushroom farmers, he added.

"The majority of the mushrooms you buy from the grocery store are grown in it," Burk said.

Horse manure, wood shavings as well as manure from chicken and cows can all be used to generate power at a Swebo facility. In fact, young female milk cows produce twice as much waste as horses, according to Burk.

"There's any number of things (Swebo) can use as a fuel source, but at the top of the list is shavings and manure," Burk said.

Lindgren said Swebo bio-burners produce little smoke and few emissions, and can handle the waste of 20 to 1,500 horses. Lindgren and state officials said there was little to no smell emitted in the process.

Most of Swebo's customers' facilities in Europe are located either on or next to farms, Lindgren said. Both farmers and the environment benefit because there is no need for costly, diesel-guzzling trucks to dispose of manure and no toxic run-off into water sources, according to Lindgren. Plus, buildings can be heated with the energy produced by burning the manure.

"We're solving environmental problems," Lindgren said.

Bruce Bowman is a retired scientist with Canada's agriculture department and webmaster of ManureNet, a Web site about manure and nutrient management and bioenergy issues. He said considering the critical nutrient run-off problems in the Chesapeake Bay, he understood why state officials would be interested in technology that turned manure into energy.

Still, he felt anaerobic digesters held greater promise. Although it has yet to be perfected, anaerobic digestion involves the use microorganisms to break down biological matter. Energy is produced, as well as nutrient-rich waste that is good soil fertilizer, Bowman said.

"Economically, the cheapest is to incinerate manure," Bowman said. "But the ashes left are probably not terribly good for the soil. We shouldn't be just willy-nilly sending nutrients back to the atmosphere that we have to go capture again."

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