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AGRICULTURE

## Land hit hard by citrus canker could be used to make ethanol

Florida Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson would like to see citrus groves cleared in the canker eradication effort put to use for growing crops to make fuel.

BY SUSAN SALISBURY

The Palm Beach Post

Out go the orange groves and in come the -- ethanol groves?

There's no such thing, of course, but Florida Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson is enthused about the idea of using citrus groves cleared in the canker eradication effort for growing corn, sugar cane or other crops to make ethanol or biodiesel.

Ethanol is alcohol blended with gasoline to make the fuel stretch further. Biodiesel is made from vegetable oils.

Since August 2004, the state has lost or is scheduled to lose close to 80,000 acres of commercial citrus as infected and exposed trees are removed. Citrus trees cannot be replanted on the land for at least two years.

Vegetable farmers and others whose crops have been battered by hurricanes also could plant corn, peanuts and other crops such as grasses used for ethanol or biodiesel, Bronson said.

The diversification will help growers remain economically viable and remain in agriculture.

"By double- or triple-cropping, there is a good chance we will utilize a lot of available fertilizer left in the soil after one crop season. Fuel crops don't need the pesticide applications that food crops do. We don't care how pretty a fuel crop looks," Bronson said earlier this month.

U.S. agriculture aims to produce 25 percent of the nation's fuel by 2025, Bronson said.

University of Florida researchers are looking into the types of crops that could be used, and other states where ethanol is produced are being asked how they got started.