

# USDA Adds Bio-based Motor Oil to Biopreferred Program

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The US Government announced in June that engine crankcase oil with at least 25 percent biobased content will be afforded federal procurement preference for all agencies and government contractors under the USDA-managed BioPreferred Program. BioPreferred directors also stated at least one major motor oil manufacturer appears to currently have a qualifying product.

According to the June 11 publication of the Federal Register, the US Department of Agriculture is amending the Code of Federal Regulations to state, among other things, that engine crankcase oils procured by federal agencies and contractors “must have a minimum biobased content of at least 25 percent.”

The BioPreferred Program was created to increase the purchase and use of biobased products. Under this program, the USDA “...designates categories of biobased products that are required for purchase by Federal agencies and their contractors. As a part of this process, the minimum biobased content is specified” for each product category. Biobased content is a measurement of renewable carbon as determined under the ASTM D6866 test methodology. In addition to the procurement component, BioPreferred includes a voluntary labeling program, in which “biobased products meeting the BioPreferred program requirements may carry a distinctive label for easier identification by the consumer.”

Though this new rule is effective July 11, 2013, federal agencies and government contractors have until June 11, 2014 to “ensure that their relevant *procurement* specifications require the use of biobased engine crankcase oils” (italics added).

In preparing to set the minimum biobased content requirement, the USDA requested in fall 2012 that all interested lubricant manufacturers submit samples of biobased engine crankcase oils they were interested in selling under the BioPreferred program. Several motor oil brands submitted samples. Of the various sample formulations submitted, the bio-content ranged from the single digits to over 50%. The official announcement in the Federal Register noted that “a major marketer of engine crankcase oils” indicated it has “a line of products with biobased contents between 25 and 30 percent.”

Of the eight submitted formulations whose bio-content exceeded 25%, most were formulated with Estolide biosynthetic base oils manufactured by Biosynthetic Technologies. Estolides are a new class of synthetic base oils that are synthesized from fatty acids found in vegetable oils. The base Estolide molecule structure, which performs similar to petroleum synthetic oils, was invented by researchers at the USDA.

Manufacturers of engine oils which meet BioPreferred biobased content requirements can post company, product, performance testing, and contact information in the BioPreferred Program’s web-based catalog. When making purchases, federal agencies and their contractors are required to give preferential consideration to the qualifying products that appear in the BioPreferred catalog. Further, beginning in fall 2013, the BioPreferred program will issue marketing labels for manufacturers to add to packaging of qualifying products.

While the BioPreferred program has existed for several years, enforcement has historically been fairly lax. However, last year the Obama Administration issued a memorandum to the heads of all agencies outlining several steps they would be required to take in order to “significantly increase Federal procurement of biobased and other sustainable products” under the BioPreferred program.

*Allen Barbieri is CEO of Biosynthetic Technologies, which sells Estolide biosynthetic base oil under its “Lubrigreen” brand. After extensive testing, several of the world’s largest manufacturers of automotive and industrial lubricants are now formulating and certifying finished products containing these biosynthetic oils.*