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## Optimism for pennycress grows Producing biofuels from weed's oil is object of Innovation Fuels test

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HAMPTON — The chief executive of Albany-based Innovation Fuels Inc. said Friday he remains optimistic the effort to grow pennycress to produce biofuels will succeed.

 John Fox said his company, which is working with farmers in this Washington County community and in Easton, farther south in the county, is still assessing the initial pennycress crops that were planted last fall.

"Until you get the first spring weather, the pennycress doesn't start to come out of the ground," he said.

Pennycress, a member of the mustard family, produces a seed that's more than a third oil. The plan is to squeeze the seeds to produce biodiesel.

An acre of pennycress can yield 100 to 200 gallons of the fuel, Fox said. It also could be a valuable cash crop.

Farmers involved in the project said earlier this week that the initial crop hadn't grown as much as they had expected. But one said colder than normal weather may have affected the crop.

"We weren't sure whether Washington County was going to be the best growing temperature," Fox said Friday. But, he added, "we know it grows."

The company has other plots in Wisconsin, New Jersey and Alberta, Canada, as well as in other parts of New York state.

One attraction of the plant, which is considered a weed, is its ability to grow through the winter for spring harvest, freeing acreage for traditional food crops in the spring and summer.

But if it doesn't mature early enough, the pennycress could prevent farmers from planting crops that need to be in the ground before June.

Fox expects the warm weather forecast for this weekend to help.

"We have to harvest no matter what before the end of June," he said. "We'll do an analysis of the oil content of the seeds. We might have a region where it grows sparsely but the oil content is very high," he said.

Fox said the company also will look at planting pennycress on "marginal land" that wouldn't be used for food crops.