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## TOP STORIES



Graduate student Ronald Sidharta, left, demonstrates the C6 virtual reality room to Sen. Tom Harkin at the Iowa State University Virtual Applications Center Wednesday in Ames. Harkin is seeking more funding for the center and the Ames Laboratory at ISU through defense appropriations bills.



Jim Oliver, director of the virtual reality center, shows Harkin one of the facility's applications.

### [High-tech tour](#)

Sen. Tom Harkin seeks funds for virtual reality and mandates for bioproducts during ISU visit

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City Council member wants zoning commission seat to go to a woman

### [Regents undecided on where to spend funding](#)

DAVENPORT - The Board of Regents will get \$5 million from the Values Fund this year to help boost the Iowa economy

### [Tax-free holiday 'great for business'](#)

Iowa's sales tax holiday occurs Friday and Saturday, and some Ames businesses are gearing up for two busy days

### [Ames juveniles busted for vandalism](#)

Three Ames juveniles were taken into custody after a vandalism spree last week

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# High-tech tour

By Josh Nelson, Staff Writer  
08/04/2005

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New technology and government regulations could bolster Iowa's research centers and provide a major push for economic development, Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, said Wednesday during a tour of two Iowa State University research facilities.

During his tour, Harkin stopped at the Virtual Reality Applications Center and the Ames Laboratory, which both are part of a larger network of research centers at ISU.

The virtual reality center has been working with the Department of Defense on new ways to control unmanned aerial vehicles, which are being used in Iraq and Afghanistan. Cedar Rapids-based Rockwell Collins Inc. and the Boeing Company have both expressed interest in the project.

Harkin said he would like to get more money for the center in the next defense appropriations bill.

The state, however, will likely see larger gains from innovations at the Ames laboratory. The lab is working on ways to improve and promote commercially viable bio-based products.

Harkin included a provision in the 2002 Farm Bill that would require government agencies to give preference to bio-based products.

The provision has not yet been implemented. But George Kraus, ISU university professor of chemistry, said the West Central Cooperative, a biodiesel plant in Ralston, already has been working with researchers at the university on ways to convert glycerin, a byproduct of biodiesel production, into a useful polymer.

Kraus said the polymer can then be used as a base for other products, such as biodegradable carpeting. Kraus' Center for Catalysis was founded in 2003 to research environmentally friendly technologies - including biorefineries.

Also, versions of the Energy Bill, which have been passed by both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate, require an increase in the national renewable fuels standard.

The House version of the bill, which passed last week, would require 7.5 billion gallons of ethanol to be produced by 2012 and effectively double the existing standard. The Senate version also called for sharp increases in ethanol and biodiesel production.

The increase in ethanol and biodiesel production could spike interest in bio-refineries, which take byproducts from ethanol and biodiesel and turn them into other kinds of commercially viable products, because the mandate would also increase the amount of byproducts produced.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently came up with a list of preferable bio-based products, Harkin said. There were only seven items on the list. A new list of products is expected to be compiled soon, he said.

Regulations already require all government papers to be printed with soy ink.

The catalysis center has also worked closely with other agriculture producers in Iowa, including West Central and Midwest Grain Producers in Lakota, on other bio-based product, Kraus said.

The center also has looked into ways to produce biodiesel more cheaply. Alternative methods include incorporating used animal fats and vegetable oils from restaurants, Kraus

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### Market Watch

<a href="#">GE</a>	33.74	-.20
<a href="#">MSFT</a>	26.89	-.11
<a href="#">IBM</a>	80.68	-.34
<a href="#">ORCL</a>	13.44	-.12
<a href="#">INTC</a>	25.58	-.12
<a href="#">QQQ</a>	39.12	-.08

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said.

Bruce Harmon, distinguished professor of chemistry and physics, said many of the new discoveries, which include a form of lead-free solder, have generated about \$4 million in revenue from patents.

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