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Bacteria might prove to be energy source

By Jonathan Jay Gibian

U.S. scientists say bacteria might be able to provide sustainable, renewable energy.

University of Massachusetts researchers, using a variety of natural food sources, found bacteria can be used to create electricity, produce alternative fuels such as ethanol and boost the output of existing oil wells.

"Microbial fuel cells show promise for conversion of organic wastes and renewable biomass to electricity, but further optimization is required for most applications," said Derek Lovley of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Earlier this month, Lovley announced achieving a 10-fold increase in electrical output by allowing bacteria in microbial fuel cells to grow on biofilms in the electrodes of a fuel cell.

This week, Gemma Reguera, a researcher in Lovley's lab, is to present data identifying for the first time how those bacteria are able to transfer electrons through the biofilms to the electrodes.

The research is being discussed this week in Orlando, Fla., during the 106th General Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology.



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