



NEWS RELEASE

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Subject: AVI Volunteers create Chelan County's first plug-in tractor

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A 1950s-era Allis Chalmers model G tractor, on the Sunshine Farm in Chelan, has been freed from the oil habit and is the first tractor in North Central Washington converted to use only electricity.

Eight volunteers with Advanced Vehicle Innovations (AVI) and Rachel Airmet of the Sunshine Institute and The Sunshine Farm worked all day April 7th in the automotive technology training center at Wenatchee Valley College converting the gasoline tractor into a plug-in electric vehicle. AVI member Randy Brooks, president of Brooks Solar Inc., led the conversion effort after hours of advance preparation to reduce shop time. Brooks purchased and preassembled the electric motor, 48-volt battery pack and components, conversion mounting kit, and tested the setup prior to installation.

“We actually got the tractor assembled in about five hours, but then had some electrical troubleshooting that took awhile,” Brooks said. “All who worked on the project took time to do the most professional job possible. There are still a couple little details to finish, but it's operational!”

The Allis Chalmers G, a reliable tractor for cultivating row crops, will plug into a standard socket to charge the battery pack. Airmet said the charge should easily last for the time it takes to cultivate the three and a half acres on which she grows 40 different crops for marketing locally.

The idea for conversion stemmed from the mission of The Sunshine Institute, a non-profit educational organization working with the Sunshine Farm to promote sustainable agriculture and regional food systems. Institute director, Guy Evans, saw several advantages of an electric tractor. The Institute is dedicated to promoting sustainable food production, so using a tractor that doesn't emit carbon dioxide fits well with our mission,” he said. “The tractor is quieter with an electric motor, there's no exhaust to smell, and electricity is much cheaper than gasoline.”

Electric tractors are rare in the U.S., though they were marketed briefly by General Electric in the 1970s. Only one North American firm, in Ontario, sells new electric tractors but hobbyists around the country are converting conventional tractors to plug-ins. Brooks said he found the conversion kit and assembly instructions (www.flyingbeet.com/electricg) from a New York farming operation which received a USDA grant to re-invigorate the technology..

“The Port of Chelan County and members of the Advanced Vehicle Innovations consortium are proud of this third plug-in demonstration project,” said Ron Johnston-Rodriguez, economic development director for the Port. “The Sunshine Farm’s electric tractor, the Port’s plug-in Prius, and the Lake Chelan School District’s plug-in hybrid electric school bus are concrete examples of how internal combustion engines can be coupled with or converted to electric technology. Electrifying transportation is one solution for reducing our dependence on foreign oil and reducing carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming.”

On May 14th and 15th, The Sunshine Farm electric tractor, the plug-in Prius and many other electrically powered vehicles will be showcased at AVI’s third summit, “Power Up! Electrifying Transportation”, held at the Wenatchee Convention Center. Among the renowned speakers scheduled is Steve Heckerth of Renewables.com, one of the nation’s leading innovators in electric tractor construction and conversions. For more information on the “Power Up! Electrifying Transportation Summit” go to www.plugincenter.com or call the Port of Chelan County at (509) 663-5159.

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PHOTO caption: AVI Technical Group volunteers (clockwise, from left) Mike Brogan, Randy Brooks, Doug Janke, Larry Epperson and Bill Hoffer make adjustments on North Central Washington’s first electric tractor while owner Rachel Airmet looks on. The tractor was converted from gas to electric power on April 7 in the Wenatchee Valley College automotive technology laboratory.