



Greenwashing Energy Crops

Biofuels, the Biggest Scam Going

By JIM GOODMAN

Where is agriculture headed? Can we feed a growing population and meet the demand for biofuels in the Industrialized North? Supporters of biofuel agriculture, (grain and chemical companies, Wall St. investors, politicians and most University researchers) avoid mentioning the cost of inputs, the fossil fuels, the environmental damage, the physical toll on animals and humans, and the growing problem of hunger that will accompany the switch from food to energy crop production. They want us to believe the switch to energy crops will be so easy and so practical. Iowa Senator Charles Grassley tells us that "BioFuels" will give agriculture new importance as a producer of energy as well as food and fiber. It will be a win, win, win, situation, good for America's energy independence, economic prosperity and for the

As an energy source they are less efficient and no "greener" than oil. Growing them will cause food prices to rise and as a result, the poor will be at an even greater risk of hunger. Rain forests will be destroyed and become cropland, peasants around the world will continue to lose their land, their food sovereignty, all to feed the world's appetite for fuel.

environment.

Will bioenergy production save American agriculture, end our dependence on oil, save the environment and keep food on everyone's table? Perhaps not. Biofuels are not the "cash cow" farmers were promised. Can biofuels replace a significant amount of fossil fuel? Perhaps not. If, in 2006, we had dedicated the entire US corn crop to ethanol production we would have replaced only 12% of the gasoline we used. If we had planted every acre of cropland in the nation to corn we would have replaced only 80% of the gasoline we used. If the U.S. Energy Information Administration is correct in its estimates, and by 2030 the US is capable of producing 700,000 barrels of ethanol per day, we will have succeeded in offsetting roughly 6 percent of our transportation fuel needs.

Is ethanol really a renewable fuel? Perhaps not. An article in *Science* magazine in 2006 showed that, based on the work of researchers at UC Berkeley, only 5 to 26% of the energy in ethanol is "renewable". The fossil fuel needed to grow and process the ethanol actually negated the majority of its energy value.

Are biofuels really better for the environment? Perhaps not. Data from the University of Edinburgh shows that biofuels produce high levels of nitrous oxide a greenhouse gas 300 times more potent than CO₂. In total they can produce 70% more greenhouse gas emissions than fossil fuels.

Will we be able to produce significant levels of energy crops without impacting world food supplies and prices? Perhaps not. Biofuel production could push food prices up as much as 20-40% according to The International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington.

The production of biofuels depends on billions of dollars in government subsidies in the form of loan guarantees for the construction of biofuel plants, tax exemptions on biofuels and direct payments to farmers. A 2006 study by the International Institute for Sustainable Development showed an annual subsidy cost of \$1.05-\$1.38 per gallon of ethanol produced, a total of \$7billion. How much are we willing to spend and for what?

Biofuels are a greenwash scam, a feel good solution for the end of cheap oil. When one considers the industrial agricultural system that is necessary for their production, biofuels are anything but sustainable. Costly inputs of fuel, fertilizer and biotech seed will challenge the profitability of Northern farmers while peasant farmers will continue to be evicted to make room for monocultures of corn, soy, sugarcane and oil palms. Food prices will climb, hunger and poverty will increase and we will be no closer to energy independence or truly renewable fuels.

Now that the President and Congress have, through the Farm and Energy Bills, locked us into large scale production of energy crops and the belief we can continue to live our lives as usual with no pain, what do we do? We need energy solutions that will work; tough vehicle fuel standards, new public transportation systems, real renewable fuels like solar and wind and mandated commitments to conservation and recycling, now, not a 2030 "pie in the sky".

So, when we drive to the supermarket and complain about the high prices, then proceed to load up our flex-fuel SUV, will we think about the 50% of the worlds population that lives on less than \$2 a day? Will we even consider that when we bought into the biofuel scam we also took away their food sovereignty and may have handed them a death sentence?

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