



Renewable Fuels Association

*“The Voice of the Ethanol Industry  
for More Than a Quarter Century”*

One Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 820  
Washington, DC 20001  
202.289.3835  
www.ethanolRFA.org

## **The Journalistic Scam: How *Time* and Author Michael Grunwald Failed Their Readers**

The cover story in *Time* this week lacks the kind of balance expected from a respected journal of *Time*'s stature. In what can best be described as an editorial, author Michael Grunwald presents his preconceived view of ethanol's role in addressing global climate change without allowing anyone with a different point of view a chance to refute his claim that biofuels are worse for the planet than gasoline and fossil fuels.

*Time*'s editorial position aside, the fact remains that the issues of climate change and land use are complex. Explaining the reasons for changes in land use and the resulting climatic impacts is not accomplished by simply blaming biofuels. Among the critical issues that impact land use changes overlooked by *Time* include:

- **Across the globe, populations are rising and economies are growing.** In Asia and India, the middle class is expanding rapidly and increasing demand for dairy and meat products. The new demand is placing additional pressure on global agriculture to feed livestock. This phenomenon is demonstrated by the fact that American exports of grain are on pace to be the highest in history.
- **Cities and urban areas are continuing to expand.** The growing population and the migration of rural residents to suburban developments are turning valuable farmland into subdivisions and shopping malls. The U.S. loses approximately 2 million acres of farmland annually. Those lost acres are clearly putting additional pressure of farmers to produce more with less.
- **Deforestation and the conversion of land into agricultural production have been going on long before widespread ethanol production.** For decades, forests have been cleared and savannahs plowed under to make way for development and agricultural purposes and to support logging and other industries, legal and otherwise.

*Time*'s editorial relies heavily on papers recently published in *Science* that portray a dubious scenario in which biofuels lead directly to the destruction of the rain forests and release more greenhouse gas emissions than they reduce. However, numerous scientists have questioned the assumptions made in these papers, and have reaffirmed the conclusion that biofuels do help to address global climate change. *Time* made no mention of these critical issues, or its piece would have included the following:

- The use of an acre of corn for ethanol production in the U.S. doesn't correspond to an acre of rain forest being cleared. As Dr. Wang at Argonne National Labs points out, "There has also been no indication that U.S. corn ethanol production has so far caused indirect land use changes in other countries because U.S. corn exports have been maintained at about 2 billion bushels a year and because U.S. [distillers grains] exports have steadily increased in the past ten years."

- The reckless use of fossil fuels has released the greenhouse gases that are at the heart of global climate change today. These are gases that we cannot remove from the atmosphere. And without viable, renewable alternatives like biofuels, we are relegated to increasing our fossil fuel use. Only this time, those fossil fuels will come from sources 3 times as environmentally degrading as oil today (see the Canadian tar sands). Dr. Bruce Dale of Michigan State University writes, “Also, biofuels must be compared with appropriate alternatives. The choice is not between biofuels and some perfect, imaginary fuel. We are going to provide fuels for our vehicles, whether those fuels come from biomass, tar sands, coal, oil shale or some other source. I believe there are strong reasons to question the assumptions, data and comparisons made in these two papers.”

Had *Time* taken the time to speak with advocates and experts on biofuels, statements like these would have been included in their article:

- Understanding land use changes and the carbon footprint of all fuels is vital, but it shouldn't be done with a sole purpose in mind. Evaluating all fuels – petroleum and plant-based – must be done carefully and compare apples to apples. Such an evaluation will clearly show that biofuels are an environmental improvement over fossil fuels.
- The production of biofuels is rapidly improving in efficiency and environmental footprint. Today's ethanol industry alone is embracing new technologies that increase ethanol yields, decrease natural gas and water use, and utilize new feedstocks in addition to grain to produce ethanol. The environmental benefits of biofuel use are continuing to improve.
- Conversely, the environmental footprint of petroleum continues to worsen. Insatiable global demand for oil is forcing the development of nontraditional oil sources at greater expense to the environment. One of the most popular nontraditional sources – Canadian tar sands – require the clearing of boreal forests, huge sums of water, and emit 300% more greenhouse gases than traditional petroleum development.
- Biofuels are a critical part of this nation's energy future. They represent the only viable opportunity today to reduce foreign petroleum dependence, create domestic economic opportunities and constructively address the climate challenges resulting from vehicle emissions. Condemning biofuels, yet failing to offer another path forward, relegates us to the status quo and further delays the hard work of diversifying our nation's energy future.