

Missing the Forest for the Trees

Michael Grunwald's harangue against biofuels – and specifically America's ethanol industry – is frightfully unbalanced and fraught with inaccurate or questionable information. In his rush to vilify ethanol, Mr. Grunwald conveniently glosses over important facts and marginalizes viewpoints that differ from his own. Still, because Mr. Grunwald chose to ignore them does not make them any less relevant or important.

On its face, Mr. Grunwald's assertion that ethanol and biofuels are worse for the planet than gasoline is patently absurd. The reports published in *Science* on which Mr. Grunwald builds his case have been called into question by a host of academic researchers, notably the notion that an acre of corn used for ethanol in the U.S. results in an acre cleared rainforest. As Dr. Michael Wang from Argonne National Laboratories wrote in response to the studies, "At this time, it is not clear what land use changes could occur globally as a result of U.S. corn ethanol production."

Yet, questions raised about these reports are not included and *Time's* paying readership is misled to believe these reports are the Gospel truth rather than allowed to weigh the facts and make independent judgments of their own.

Beyond the reliance on scientifically questionable studies, the article singles out biofuels while blatantly ignoring many of the other factors that are leading to deforestation and driving commodity prices higher, providing the incentive for farmers worldwide to produce more.

Across the globe, populations are rising and economies are growing. In Asia and India, the middle classes are expanding rapidly and increasing demand for dairy and meat products. The new demand is placing additional pressure on global agriculture to feed the livestock that produce these goods. This phenomenon is demonstrated by the fact that American exports of grain are on pace to be the highest in history.

Simultaneously, the growing population is in need of housing. The resulting development of subdivisions and shopping malls costs America an average of nearly 3 acres of farmland every minute.

Further complicating the equation is the soaring demand for fossil fuels across the globe. Those expanding economies are gobbling up petroleum supplies around the world and in part have driven oil prices to record levels. This volatility in world energy markets underscores the necessity of energy diversification that is now underway thanks to the development of biofuels like ethanol. Brazil, in part through its own ethanol industry, has become energy self-sufficient.

Add to the mix lax environmental law enforcement and a surge in illegal logging and it becomes quite clear that the factors leading to the destruction of the rainforests are multiple and complex.

Everyone in the biofuels industry agrees that rainforest and other environmentally vital ecosystems ought not to be destroyed to produce biofuels. But to dismiss the important role biofuels must play in our quest to reduce oil dependence and mitigate global climate change in favor of questionable science and overheated rhetoric is foolhardy.

Mr. Grunwald's assertion that biofuels are making global warming worse is unsupported by undisputable fact and his failure to include differing points of view severely question the credibility of his reporting on this subject. This is an important debate and one that must be conducted sans unsubstantiated apocalyptic claims.

The American biofuels industry welcomes this debate.

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