



Biofuel arguments must be accurate

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A UK-based information service for bioenergy and energy agriculture has once again called for informed debate on the pros and cons of a domestic biofuel industry after yet another opinion piece was published in the national press based on partial research.

Yesterday's *Independent* newspaper carried an 'Expert View' by self-styled carbon author Chris Goodall which argued that plans for a large bioethanol plant on the Humber (recently announced by a consortium of BP, Associated British Foods (ABF) and DuPont) would increase food and fuel prices while doing little to reduce carbon emissions.

Enagri's editor, Richard Crowhurst, said, "Once again we have the same arguments trotted out by a so-called expert who presents an entirely one sided view of an incredibly complex topic." Referring to a comment made by Mr Goodall about the press coverage of the announcement, Richard adds, "Even when he has investigated and found something to be unreliable, he still quotes it in his article."

Enagri has written to the *Independent* addressing some of the assumptions made in the article. "For an expert, Mr Goodall shows a somewhat shallow knowledge," says Richard. "For example, he ignores the fact that BP have already said they will be looking at implementing state of the art technology, as well as using the site as test facility for the production of biobutanol fuel.

"He also fails to mention the financial effect that the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) legislation will have on the economics of biofuel inclusion in the UK. Enagri is all about fully presenting all sides of the bioenergy debate in an accessible and understandable way. Perhaps Mr Goodall should consider a subscription."

For more information contact:

Richard Crowhurst, Editorial Director
Enagri Limited
Fairview, Leadenhall Road
Holbeach St Marks
Spalding
PE12 8EY
Tel. 01406 400002 or 01406 701690
info@enagri.info
www.enagri.info

Notes for Editors:

1. Enagri is a web-based information provider focusing on the bioenergy and energy agriculture.
2. The letter sent by Enagri to the *Independent* is reproduced below:

Sir

Could someone explain why Chris Goodall, a former director of Which, qualifies as an 'expert' on biofuels (With the EU at the wheel, biofuel will cost us dear - 15 July 2007)? For someone who makes a living from promoting low carbon living he seems exceptionally worried about rising petrol prices. His column trots out the usual arguments used by opponents of biofuels, but fails to back up many of his assertions with references or data.

He also confuses 'press reports' of the announcement by BP, ABF and DuPont, with the information provided by the companies themselves. I have carefully read the original press releases from these companies and can confirm that there are no statements to the effect that 'the impact on food prices would be "negligible"'. Before relying on un-attributed quotes in the media, perhaps Mr Goodall should check his own sources?

As to the proposed biofuel planting wiping out the UK trade surplus of wheat, from a carbon point of view isn't it better that the UK uses its surplus crop (last year around 1.6 million tonnes) domestically, rather than exporting it and importing a proportion back again? As for rising food prices, it is true that food prices may rise on the back of higher commodity prices. However, wheat prices are more affected by world stocks, which are in turn determined by events such as the drought in Ukraine (which could reduce that country's cereal yields by up to 10 million tonnes this year), than by any increased demand in the UK.

If we assume a milling wheat price of £130 per tonne, the cost of the wheat contained in an average loaf of bread is 8.5 pence. The UK's leading retailer is currently selling a well known brand of 800g white loaf for 92 pence, with the raw material (the wheat) accounting for just 9 per cent of the purchase price. Assuming the cost of production remains unchanged, the market price of wheat could reach £250 a tonne and the price of a loaf of bread would still be less than £1.

Time and again critics of biofuel are unable to explain why farmers around the world should be expected to produce food below the market price. Perhaps Mr Goodall could enlighten me.

Richard Crowhurst
Editor
Enagri magazine
www.enagri.info

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