



Vermont Biofuels Association

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Greetings VBA members and supporters

Shortly after my return from the Sustainable Biodiesel Summit in Orlando Florida, last week, a story ran in the national media and *The New York Times*, “Biofuels Deemed a Greenhouse Threat”. The story highlights the findings of two recent biofuel studies published in the journal *Science*, and points to the possible consequences of utilizing lands to produce biofuel feedstocks, especially corn-based ethanol and biodiesel from palm oil. This has generated an understandable amount of concern among Vermont biodiesel users, fuel suppliers and the research and agricultural community.

These studies underscore the importance of taking a close and comprehensive look at land-use changes going on around the world as nations develop strategies to combat climate change and increase the use of alternative fuels. We believe an analysis of biofuel production should be dealt with in all its complexity, thus there are no easy answers, or a one-size-fits-all solution. We are convinced that “*Not all biofuels are created equal*” and so we are writing to you today to explain where Vermont Biofuels Association stands in relation to these issues unfolding on a global scale.

Founded in 2003, the mission of the Vermont Biofuels Association *is to build demand and capacity for locally produced biodiesel and other agriculturally derived fuels and to serve as a resource for a sustainable biofuel industry in Vermont.*

We have always believed that for biodiesel and other biofuels to meet their potential, they should be produced and used as close to the feedstock source as possible, and that local ownership of the production and distribution matters. Now that in-state demand and distribution of biodiesel is well underway, the VBA has placed most of its emphasis on helping Vermont’s farms develop the knowledge and capacity to produce oil (for food and/or fuel), and livestock feed from soy, canola and sunflower for local use. VBA members and our research partners are demonstrating that this can be done using crop rotation practices on a portion of our dedicated cropland. We now know that over the next ten years, using oilseed crops, Vermont could sustainably replace all of the diesel used in our agriculture sector (6.4 mgpy) and more than 50% of the protein that is annually imported to feed our dairies.

Field crops are an important bridge to reducing fossil fuel consumption, because at the local level they can serve as both feed and fuel. But Vermont’s biofuel community is also actively engaged in “next generation” algae and cellulosic biofuel research. Algae and biomass grown for fuels will not compete with high-value cropland for renewable energy production and the gallons of fuel produced from each acre of algae or biomass, dwarfs by comparison the yields from corn, soy or sunflower. Although these next generation

biofuel technologies are still several years from being commercialized, they offer our best hope for long-term fuel sustainability.

VBA members are working to address the danger posed by increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Even though tail pipe & stack emissions of carbon dioxide are dramatically reduced when using biodiesel (compared to petrodiesel), there is mounting evidence that the world's rush to find renewable fuel alternatives is having unintended consequences. We take these threats to our environment and our global food security seriously and if they are not addressed they could hurt the planet and its inhabitants and undermine the essential values and bright future of our industry.

We believe that commercial corn-based ethanol has no place in Vermont agriculture, but nationally it can serve as a stepping stone to more sustainable cellulosic fuel technology. We have been an outspoken critic of environmentally damaging practices, such as rainforest destruction and plowing natural grasslands, as a means of producing biodiesel or other biofuel feedstocks. In addition, many VBA members share our concern that world fuel demand is outpacing the global petroleum supply, leading to perennially higher fuel costs, potential supply disruptions, and geo-political instability.

So how do we implement a thoughtful strategy to use less energy, use more low emission fuels and reduce foreign oil imports? By calling for the increased, sustainable production and use of domestic (and local) biodiesel and even straight vegetable oil, supporting research and deployment of next generation biofuels, becoming better informed about the negative impacts of palm oil (for biodiesel) and increasing overall fuel efficiency and conserving energy wherever we can. Progress will be slow at times, measured in increments, but with sustained effort and cooperation, the long-term benefits will be significant.

Towards the end of last weekend's Sustainable Biodiesel Summit, the Executive Director of the National Biodiesel Board (NBB), Joe Jobe made this unequivocal statement, "*If we do not focus on sustainability we will not have an industry*". His comments prefaced the announcement of the formation of a Sustainable Biodiesel Task Force within the NBB. This was an unexpected and most welcome development.

The Vermont Biofuels Association, our members and partners are committed to helping Vermont move toward a more renewable, sustainable and clean energy future. Biodiesel and other biofuels, especially if produced and consumed locally, are playing an important role in lowering CO2 and other emissions, lessening our demand for foreign oil, and helping our farmland stay open, diverse and productive. It is of the utmost importance that we continue to work together to meet the critical fuel needs of Vermont and do this in a way that is increasingly local and sustainable.

We welcome your input and thank you,



Netaka White, Executive Director
On behalf of the VBA Board of Directors