



US News and World Report looks at Ethanol

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on February 6, 2007 - 12:24pm

Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

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Visiting the [Renewable Energy Conference](#) in St Louis last November, it was hard to find (apart from [the chief economist](#) from the Department of Agriculture) anyone with any doubts that ethanol would be the fuel of the future. And until very recently, apart from some well argued posts here by [Robert](#) and other contributors, it would appear that proponents of ethanol had largely convinced the Powers that Be that this was the wave of the future. However, even as the President paid homage to the promise of the fuel in his State of the Union, there has been a growing realism appearing in the writings of the Main Stream Media.

So it is today with the new story in the [US News and World Report](#) this week. Their story begins in [Galva, Iowa](#) where an ethanol operation has been in production for four years. The farmer-owned co-operative purchases 8.6 million bushels of corn to produce some 23 million gallons of ethanol a year, and, as the story notes, has returned \$13 million to the community owners. (Their success is encouraging [other local communities](#) to also join the band wagon, although the Arthur plant is planned to be some 5 times larger). But the article also carries some cautions:

Ethanol undoubtedly plays a role in the quest for energy independence and the desire to curb global warming. But some observers worry that ethanol development may take the place of more effective initiatives: forcing automakers to increase gas mileage, for instance, or mandating cuts in carbon dioxide emissions. "Some members of Congress are looking for quick fixes," says one economist who has studied the issue. "It's an easy bandwagon to jump on. But there's a lot of exaggeration about what ethanol is capable of doing."

The article also picks up on some of those that have been investing in the business, folks such as Bill Gates, and the Carlyle Group, and these folks have not been shy in their political contributions. This has, apparently not been lost on those who would lead us, with both Senators [McCain](#) and [Clinton](#) now being more favorably impressed. (Interestingly [ten years ago](#) when her husband was providing the subsidy, opinions were a tad different.

However the article also picks out the start of a modern resistance movement from industry – the likely players such as [Tyson Foods](#), who use the grain for their own food production, but also Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute. It also found that [coal-fired plants](#) are now beginning to appear, with one, operated by [Red Trail Energy](#) and fueled by lignite, opening last month in

The article concludes with some doubting comments about the likely immediate prospects for E-85 vehicles and a somewhat dim view of cellulosic ethanol. Given that, in reading the Government's Roadmap for this, I noted that there was a need for "hundreds of experiments" and that parts of the technology were still "primitive", they are certainly right on that.

As you may have noted, the article has some good new info in it, so go take a read. Me, well I am reading something else but my colleagues don't think it appropriate, so you'll just have to guess. (Grin)

And as we head into a new year of conferences, I note that there is one on [Emerging Technologies](#) at UCSB this weekend, with Paul Roberts and Amory Lovens on the schedule – could be interesting.



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