



Calling All Ethanol Proponents

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Request for Info on Ethanol Incentives and Biomass Sources

I need some help gathering information. I know that some of you will be quite knowledgeable about certain aspects of what I am looking for. I was in London this weekend ([found myself standing next to Jesse Jackson at one point](#)) having a look at a promising cellulosic ethanol technology. I will not go into details, because they don't want to release details yet, but they have asked for my assistance in developing a business plan and helping work through technical hurdles.

This is not the first time I have been asked to do something like this. It probably isn't even the 100th. But there have only ever been 2 or 3 that I saw and thought "This could be something." And this could in fact be something. It is a unique approach to the cellulosic ethanol problem – and I have no doubt that this technology will handily beat the economics and energy returns of the current cellulosic plants being built. And this isn't just a sketch on paper. They are deep into R&D on this thing.

Here is what I am looking for. While this technology already looks like it could compete right now on equal footing with corn, corn ethanol has been heavily subsidized. My counsel is that it would be very wise – looking mid to long term – to first determine who – states, federal governments, and/or foreign countries – is offering incentives for locating a cellulosic ethanol plant. It doesn't have to be limited to incentives for cellulosic ethanol, but again it has to compete with the established corn guys. There are certain areas of the country – such as the coasts, where I think this can beat the corn guys right now. But you look first to the incentives that are being offered and take advantage of those (not to say I have changed my mind about these subsidies; I still think this system is incredibly inefficient and attempts to pick technology winners).

The second think I need to know is where there are massive quantities of biomass coming into a point source. This is the low-hanging fruit. The New York City dumps have always seemed like good candidates. But I don't know if there are far better sources (quantity, uniformity) of biomass. For all I know New York recycles all of their paper and there isn't much biomass to be processed at their dump. (I doubt it, though). An additional benefit would be to find waste biomass that currently requires [tipping fees](#) for disposal.

So, to summarize I am looking for 1). Who is offering attractive incentives for cellulosic ethanol?; and 2). Where are very high volume sources of biomass coming into point sources? Again, I ask that you don't request specific details, here or through e-mails. If you want to speculate, that's fine. I think this has enough potential that tomorrow I am going to put in a request to my company to allow me to assist. If we can come to an agreement that this specific application does not present a conflict of interest or an ethical issue, I will be working with these guys. If not, then maybe a wink and a nod can put them on the right path.

What This Is Not

One thing I want to address is that this is absolutely not a silver bullet. What it is, I believe, is something that could be a significant silver BB. I think this technology could be used to realistically displace a fair fraction of our gasoline usage. But we are still talking about less than 50% in all probability (20% was my back of the envelope calculation - but that is much greater than the 0% that I currently foresee from cellulose). Even if this works out to the most optimistic forecasts, we are still going to have to conserve in a major fashion.

Personal Note

In 10 days, I will be reunited with my family for the first time in 5 months. At that time, I will take an extended break from writing. I have some time that I must make up, so instead of coming home from work and writing, I am going to make a point not to write, and use that time to experience Scotland and Europe with my family. It is an understatement to say that the past 5 months have been the most difficult of my life. My heart goes out to those in the military who are routinely separated from their children. I have filled the void in my life by writing, and I have been on a rampage for the past 5 months. But the void is about to be filled, and I doubt I will ever again participate in the same way that I once did.



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