



Drumbeat: January 9, 2012

Posted by [Leanan](#) on January 9, 2012 - 8:59am

[With Work Scarce in Athens, Greeks Go Back to the Land](#)

CHIOS, Greece — Nikos Gavalas and Alexandra Tricha, both 31 and trained as agriculturalists, were frustrated working on poorly paying, short-term contracts in Athens, where jobs are scarce and the cost of living is high. So last year, they decided to start a new project: growing edible snails for export.

As Greece's blighted economy plunges further into the abyss, the couple are joining with an exodus of Greeks who are fleeing to the countryside and looking to the nation's rich rural past as a guide to the future. They acknowledge that it is a peculiar undertaking, with more manual labor than they, as college graduates, ever imagined doing. But in a country starved by austerity even as it teeters on the brink of default, it seemed as good a gamble as any.

[Oil hovers below \\$102 ahead of Europe meeting](#)

SINGAPORE – Oil prices hovered below \$102 a barrel Monday in Asia amid investor concern that a meeting between the leaders of Germany and France won't yield a plan that will keep Europe from recession this year.

[Cost of gas rises for the first time since October](#)

The average price for a gallon of gasoline in the United States increased for the first time since mid-October, rising by 12 cents to about \$3.36 over the last three weeks due to higher crude oil prices, an industry analyst said on Sunday.

"The higher crude prices pulled up wholesale prices by about 19 cents a gallon, but retailers have passed through only 12 cents of that so far," said Trilby Lundberg, editor of the Lundberg Survey.

[Shale Bubble Inflates on Near-Record Prices](#)

Surging prices for oil and gas shales, in at least one case rising 10-fold in five weeks, are raising concern of a bubble as valuations of drilling acreage approach the peak set before the collapse of Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc.

Chinese, French and Japanese energy explorers committed more than \$8 billion in the past two weeks to shale-rock formations from Pennsylvania to Texas after 2011 set records for international average crude prices and U.S. gas demand. As competition among buyers intensifies, overseas investors are paying top dollar for fields where too few wells have been drilled to assess potential production, said Sven Del Pozzo, a senior equity analyst at IHS Inc. (IHS)

[Gulf Coast working to fill a fuel void in Northeast](#)

Northeastern states are slated to lose half of their regional capacity for fuel production by midyear as financial woes push refineries there to idle, a trend likely to increase the region's dependency on Gulf Coast supply.

A Houston-to-New York pipeline is making major expansions to accommodate growing demand to transport gasoline and other fuels up north from the Gulf Coast to fill the potential supply void.

[Speculators Raise Wagers on Price Gains by Most in 17 Months: Commodities](#)

Hedge funds raised their wagers on higher commodity prices by the most since July 2010 after signs of accelerating U.S. growth bolstered optimism that demand for raw materials will strengthen.

[Forget inflation: Is deflation the real threat?](#)

Prices of raw materials have plunged this year. The prices of copper, coffee, aluminum, cotton, nickel, natural gas, wheat and silver are all down more than 20% since the end of April, according to Bloomberg. Gold, widely viewed as a barometer of inflation, has fallen 11% since its September high of \$1,900 an ounce.

Inventories of commodities have gotten so high that metals dealers have had to buy extra warehouse space for them.

In November, copper warehouses in New Orleans were 98% full, and aluminum inventories in the U.S. are at an all-time peak, according to FastMarkets.com.

[Statoil makes large oil discovery in Barents Sea](#)

OSLO, Norway (AP) -- Norway's Statoil said Monday it has discovered a large oil reserve in the Barents Sea, its second major oil find in the Arctic region in less than a year.

The state-controlled oil company said a well drilled in the Havis prospect in the Barents Sea proved both oil and gas at an estimated volume of between 200 million and 300

million barrels of recoverable oil equivalents.

[Thai energy demand seen up almost 5 pct in 2012-ministry](#)

(Reuters) - Thailand's energy demand is expected to rise almost 5 percent in 2012, driven by economic growth and restoration work after last year's flooding plus work on flood defence systems, the Energy Policy and Planning Office of the Ministry of Energy said on Monday.

[Bangladesh to build new pipeline for Chevron gas](#)

(Reuters) - Bangladesh will build a new gas pipeline to bring output from Chevron Corp fields to the capital Dhaka and to western regions as it combats shortages.

[Statoil Wants Access To New Norwegian Acreage Despite Oil Finds](#)

OSLO -(Dow Jones)- While recent Norwegian oil discoveries by Statoil ASA (STO) are exciting, the Norwegian oil sector needs access to new acreage to avoid a substantial production fall after 2020, Statoil Chief Executive Helge Lund said Monday.

Lund revived the call for Norway to open up new acreage where development has been blocked because of environmental concerns.

[Angered by gasoline prices and corrupt government, Nigeria begins strike paralyzing nation](#)

LAGOS, Nigeria — A national strike paralyzed much of Nigeria on Monday, with more than 10,000 demonstrators swarming its commercial capital to protest soaring fuel prices and decades of government corruption in the oil-rich country.

Some protesters pulled metal barriers into the street, while others took gasoline from motorbikes to set tires ablaze. Others waved placards bearing an effigy of President Goodluck Jonathan with devil horns and fanged teeth, and showing him pumping fuel at a gas station.

[Nigerian Fuel Price Strike May Disrupt Shell's Oil Production, Close Ports](#)

Nigerian workers began a national strike after fuel costs more than doubled, threatening to shut ports and disrupt output from Royal Dutch Shell Plc and Chevron Corp. in Africa's largest crude producer.

[Kazakh leaders face a testing time as trouble looms](#)

Recent events in oil-rich Kazakhstan seem at first sight reminiscent of last year's Arab Spring revolutions. Is this Tripoli on the Caspian?

[Iran nuke work at bunker is confirmed](#)

Vienna— Diplomats on Monday confirmed a report that Iran has begun uranium enrichment at an underground bunker and said the news is particularly worrying because the site is being used to make material that can be upgraded more quickly for use in a nuclear weapon than the nation's main enriched stockpile.

[Iran Has Ability to Block Strait of Hormuz, U.S. General Dempsey Tells CBS](#)

Iran has the ability to block the Strait of Hormuz “for a period of time,” and the U.S. would take action to reopen it, Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman General Martin Dempsey said.

“They’ve invested in capabilities that could, in fact, for a period of time block the Strait of Hormuz,” Dempsey said in an interview aired yesterday on the CBS “Face the Nation” program. “We’ve invested in capabilities to ensure that if that happens, we can defeat that.”

[Hormuz Bypass Oil Pipeline Is Delayed](#)

A pipeline that would allow crude oil from the United Arab Emirates to bypass the Strait of Hormuz separating it from Iran has been delayed because of construction difficulties, two people with knowledge of the matter said.

[Iran confirms has \\$2 bln oil debt with Italy's Eni](#)

(Reuters) - An Iranian oil official has confirmed that Iran owes Italian energy major Eni some \$2 billion worth of oil that Rome is concerned could be put at risk by a European Union embargo on crude imports from the Islamic Republic.

[Oil speculators stay cautious on Iran risk: John Kemp](#)

(Reuters) - Escalating tensions between Iran and the West have so far drawn only a small amount of extra speculative money into oil-linked futures and options contracts.

Far fewer hedge funds and other money managers are wagering on a big price increase than after the Libyan civil war last year, according to position data released by the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) and exchanges.

[Indian refiners, govt meet on Iran oil payments](#)

(Reuters) - Indian refiners and oil ministry officials are meeting on Monday to discuss alternative methods to pay for Iranian oil imports should an existing mechanism via Turkey's Halkbank be halted under U.S. sanctions against Tehran.

[Syrians mourn protesters amid tension](#)

Damascus, Syria (CNN) -- Tens of thousands turned out Monday for funerals in the Syrian capital of Damascus, holding up pictures and lining the streets in tearful processions.

At one funeral, crowds chanted, "overthrow Assad, overthrow the regime!" as they blamed the man's death on government forces.

[Venezuela Won't Accept World Bank Ruling on Exxon, Chavez Says](#)

Venezuela won't accept any verdict from the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, including Exxon Mobil Corp.'s claim for its nationalized Cerro Negro project, President Hugo Chavez said.

The Washington-based court is considering Exxon's claim in one of about 20 suits filed there against the Venezuelan government. Chavez, a self-professed socialist revolutionary, has taken over assets in the energy, metals, cement and telecommunications industries.

[An Oily Case: Chevron's Never-Ending, Record-Breaking Lawsuit in Ecuador](#)

How long has the legal battle between indigenous groups in the Ecuadorean Amazon and the oil giant Chevron been going on? So long that Texaco—the company originally accused of dumping 18 billion gallons of toxic sludge in and around the Ecuadorean town of Lago Agrio—no longer exists, having been acquired by Chevron in 2001. So long that six separate Ecuadorean judges have been involved in the case, and one federal judge in New York died before he could make a ruling. So long that former President Bill Clinton had just moved into the White House when the lawsuit was first filed in 1993. And until recently, it looked like it could easily go on for another 18 years—as a Chevron spokesperson once said: “We’re going to fight this until Hell freezes over—an then we’ll fight it out on the ice.”

[Shale Game](#)

New York State is a lonely holdout against the natural-gas revolution.

[Locals call BP's feel-good Gulf ads 'propaganda'](#)

NEW ORLEANS — Nearly 20 months after its massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill — and just as Americans focus on New Orleans, host of the college football championship game — BP is pushing a slick nationwide public relations campaign to persuade Americans that the Gulf region has recovered.

[Battery cars face an uphill climb to acceptance](#)

A spectacular flop, or just a slow start?

One thing is certain, the battery car is going to have to gain some serious momentum if it's going to have a real impact on the U.S. automotive market -- or come anywhere close to meeting the White House's target of putting 1.5 million battery-powered cars on the road by mid-decade.

[Battery Warning: Why Electric Vehicles Have Yet to Take Off](#)

But as electric vehicles moved from the showroom to the driveway, certain facts became hard to ignore—facts that could slow down the adoption of EVs even more. In a piece for the website Jalopnik—which, to be fair, seems to really dislike EVs—Joel Johnson explained why Americans aren't going electric. It essentially boils down to cost: electric cars cost too much and deliver too little, especially for Americans who don't live in dense urban areas.

[Congressional Inaction on Extending Commuter Benefits Leads Public Transit Riders to See Taxes Increase More Than \\$550 in 2012](#)

Due to Congressional inaction during last month's tax deliberations, the new year ushered in a tax increase to public transit riders. Currently, commuters who use public transit, commuter buses and van pools may see their annual commuting costs increase by more than \$550 based on a bias in the tax code that benefits driving over taking public transit. In addition, the failure to extend the benefit has resulted in a tax liability increase for companies offering the benefit.

[Possible U.S., China trade dispute looms](#)

The U.S. government will decide whether China-made solar cells, high-pressure steel cylinders, galvanized steel wires and steel wheels from China are dumped, or sold below cost, in the U.S.

If so, it could impose tariffs that impair Chinese companies' ability to sell those products in the U.S. China's Ministry of Commerce, meanwhile, has launched its own investigation of American solar cell makers, and is also probing such U.S. industries as photographic

paper. The agency could decide to impose duties as early as this year.

[Could Saudi Arabia Become the Next Solar Market Hotspot?](#)

Oil's more than likely the first thing that pops into your mind when Saudi Arabia is mentioned. Sunlight might follow close behind, though, and for good reason. Located within the equatorial "Sun Belt," where more solar radiation hits the earth than any other part of the globe, best available measurements are that Saudi Arabia receives an average 2,200 thermal kilowatt hours (kWh) of solar energy per square meter of land area every day. That's an abundant amount of freely available solar energy just waiting to be harnessed. Crafting policies that would stimulate adoption of solar energy systems and development of a solar energy economic value chain could also make significant contributions to critical social and environmental challenges the country faces.

[Dubai launches \\$3.27 bln solar energy project](#)

DUBAI (Reuters) - The emirate of Dubai on Monday unveiled plans to build a 12 billion dirham solar energy park, with potential capacity of 1,000 megawatts as part of its efforts to reduce its energy reliance.

Under Dubai's Integrated Energy Strategy 2030, it plans to reduce energy imports and climate warming carbon dioxide emissions by 30 percent by 2030, using its own solar power and nuclear power imported from neighbouring emirate Abu Dhabi to reduce reliance on gas.

[Renewables making inroads in emerging global energy mix](#)

Renewables are to be a significant pillar of the global energy balance of tomorrow. This is where the future lies, insist the green lobby, the environmentalists and indeed the peak oil pundits. Most agree, if this crude driven civilization has to keep making strides, then renewables have to make a bigger and significant contribution to the global energy mix over the next decades or so.

[Can a cleaner environment create jobs?](#)

NEW YORK (CNNMoney) -- The tactic du jour for environmentalists trying to sell a skeptical public on tighter regulations is this: spin the thing as a job creator.

[Liberty for Light Bulbs -- The Next Battle In America's Fight for Freedom](#)

Two hundred and thirty six years ago, in January 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, the wildly popular pamphlet that made the case for American freedom and helped to spark a revolution.

This year, the Tea Party hopes to turn the 2012 elections into a fight for American freedom. Their first salvo -- the electric light bulb. Last month, they threatened to shut down the government unless new energy efficiency standards for light bulbs were delayed. They succeeded and the final budget deal prohibits the Department of Energy from spending on the new rules.

[Americans make up half of the world's richest 1%](#)

NEW YORK (CNMoney) -- The United States holds a disproportionate amount of the world's rich people.

It only takes \$34,000 a year, after taxes, to be among the richest 1% in the world. That's for each person living under the same roof, including children. (So a family of four, for example, needs to make \$136,000.)

[One step closer to local food security](#)

How close are meat producers to having a working mobile abattoir in the Boundary region?

In January 2011 Boundary meat producers met with government representatives to discuss the future of the meat industry in the Boundary. At this meeting livestock producers said their number one priority was a licensed mobile abattoir, or mobile processing unit (MPU), with processing and marketing facilities a close second.

[Sahel's looming food crisis gets swift response but no long-term answers](#)

Late rains mean trouble for the "lean season", when food from the last harvest runs out. This year's lean season could begin in some countries as early as March, three months earlier than usual. Brown sounded the alarm in October and since then there has been a flurry of warnings about the looming crisis in the Sahel.

[Carbon emissions 'will defer Ice Age'](#)

In the journal Nature Geoscience, they write that the next Ice Age would begin within 1,500 years - but emissions have been so high that it will not.

"At current levels of CO₂, even if emissions stopped now we'd probably have a long interglacial duration determined by whatever long-term processes could kick in and bring [atmospheric] CO₂ down," said Luke Skinner from Cambridge University.

[The Next Ice Age and the Anthropocene](#)

If you've wondered where to look for signs that Earth is entering a geological epoch of our own making, the Anthropocene, what's a good place to start?

I'd suggest the growing body of research concluding that what was once seen as an inevitable descent into the next ice age has been put off for a very long time by the building blanket of greenhouse gases generated by humanity's burst of fossil fuel combustion.

[Study: Rising sea levels will hit hard in South Florida](#)

A sea-level rise of just a few inches will bring flooding to South Florida cities, contaminate sources of drinking water and lead to sharp increases in utility bills over the next 20 or 30 years, according a study released Wednesday by Florida Atlantic University.

The study found that projected sea level increases of 3 to 6 inches by 2030, due to global warming, could overwhelm flood-control systems that in many areas are more than 50 years old. The authors provided a list of steps to be taken in the coming decades, from moving drinking-water wells inland to installing more pump stations, that could help the region cope with the higher water.



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