



Esperanca Sinela's Maize crop, Mozambique. Photo credit: Gisele Wulfsohn/Panos/ActionAid

BIOFUELS, FOOD SECURITY AND LAND GRABS

INTRODUCTION

The unsustainable expansion of biofuels production around the world is one of the primary contributors to higher and more volatile food prices. The US Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) has played a key part in this, mandating a growing amount of biofuels to be blended into the US fuel supply. Without decisive action on the part of the US to eliminate its mandates for land-intensive biofuels from corn, sugar, and soy, this trend will continue, with poor people in developing countries bearing the brunt of the burden.

BIOFUELS: A FALSE SOLUTION

When the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) was written, the idea was to create a renewable source of fuel at home. Unfortunately this legislation turned out to be dangerously short-sighted. Not only is corn the foundation of the US food system, but the US is also the world's largest corn exporter. This means that policies placing an additional, inflexible demand on the US corn harvest make supply tighter and the international price more volatile, leading to price shocks and increased food insecurity. The prices of other cereal staples are impacted too as, for example, when wheat is used as a substitute for high-priced corn, raising the demand and the price for wheat.

Ever-increasing demand for biofuels produced from corn, sugar, and soy have contributed significantly to the expansion of industrial agriculture in the US and around the world. Since it was expanded in 2007, the corn ethanol mandate

Biofuel Mandates in a Hungry World

When the RFS mandated that corn be used for fuel it ignored several harmful consequences:

1. Linking food and fuel prices: Using corn for fuel inextricably links the price of corn to the price of oil. When demand for oil increases so does demand for corn.
2. Diverting food and feed for fuel: As a result of mandates for food-based ethanol, corn and other crops that once went to food or feed were diverted into the fuel supply. From 2000 to 2012 the percentage of US corn used to produce biofuel increased from 5 to 40%.
3. Changing climate: As the climate changes, extreme weather events happen more frequently. When a severe drought or other natural disaster impacts crops it decreases the supply and increases the price. At the same time, mandates for biofuels continue unchanged, absorbing an even larger percentage of the decimated crop and pushing prices to all-time highs.

has contributed to plowing up more than 23 million acres of US wetlands and grasslands to plant crops -- an area the size of Indiana. Internationally, the expanding production of biofuel feedstocks in places like Guatemala has made it

much harder for small-scale food producers to access land to feed themselves and their communities.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY?

1. **Increased food insecurity:** People living in poverty typically spend between 60-80% of their income on food. When prices increase, even just a little, families are forced to make tough choices. Evidence shows, for example, that almost 65% of poor households in Uganda have responded to soaring food prices by reducing food consumption and dietary diversity.
2. **Cost to developing countries:** US corn ethanol mandates cost developing countries \$6.6 billion from 2006 - 11. For Guatemala the additional cost of importing corn was \$28 million for the trade year 2010-2011 alone -- an amount equivalent to US food assistance to Guatemala over the same period. This means that the US is essentially cancelling out its foreign assistance investments in a country where half the population falls below the poverty line and half of all children under the age of 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition.
3. **A fight for land:** Due to the runaway expansion in biofuels production, people around the world are finding that the land that they use to grow food and feed their families is becoming more valuable. In some cases this has led to land grabs. In others, it has meant a shortage of available land for small-scale food production. From Guatemala to Tanzania, smallholder farmers have been removed from their land to facilitate the production of biofuel feedstocks.



ActionAid activist in Europe speaking up about hunger and poverty.
Photo credit: Christophe Hebling/ActionAid

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Tell your Representative and Senators to eliminate US mandates for food-based biofuels to alleviate the impact of biofuels on food security and land rights. Sign 3 copies of the Food not Fuel postcards – one for each Senator and one for your Representative – and return them to ActionAid for delivery at a key moment. Call the offices of your Representative and Senators or gather a group of friends to visit their district office.
2. Spread the word: Now tell your friends and get them to take action too!

For more information please visit www.actionaidusa.org/what-we-do/land-rights-and-biofuels



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