

Is Reduction of Our Dependence on Foreign Oil Just Talk?

Source: National Algae Association

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Is the government's commitment to alternative fuels being stymied by the American Petroleum Institute, or is the Department of Energy stymying the commitment all by itself?

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia recently canceled a mandate from the Environmental Protection Agency that required refiners to buy cellulostic biofuels (ethanol fermented from grasses, solid waste and other non-food materials. Most ethanol in the United States is made from corn) as a way of supporting the nascent alternative fuel industry. The Court ruled that the mandate for 2012, which would have held oil refiners accountable for purchasing nearly 8.7 million of gallons of the biofuel even though none is commercially available for sale, was based on flawed projections. The ruling saved the industry close to \$6.8 million in waiver payments to the EPA, since there were no actual gallons available for sale.

Exactly whose flawed projections was the mandate based on? Were these the projections based on what we were told would be produced from all of the **Billions** of grant dollars the Department of Energy was spending? Didn't anybody else realize that the money was going to university research teams and the lab equipment they thought they needed, and not to commercial production of anything? Didn't anyone else realize that most of the research projects were fully funded but less than 30% complete?

The Biomass Program at the DoE has been staffed by an illustrious group of researchers. Their obligation is to follow the congressional mandate that institutions of higher education participate in each grant. None of them feel the least bit obligated to mention that until the money is redirected to the private sector where commercialization is possible, it will never happen. None of them feel the least bit obligated to admit that they have rooms full of technologies that are unproven in scale larger than a lab or that they may have been rendered obsolete by subsequent research. None of them have the business skills necessary to achieve commercialization, or to hire the people who do, and yet, this is the group to whom the duty of commercialization was bestowed.

The few business people – the ones who understand the process of commercialization – have parted ways with the DoE because of the lack of ability by those decision makers to admit that the program, as currently written, cannot be successful.

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