

Algae Biofuels – Time for a Reality Check

Algae research for advanced biofuels has sounded like a wonderful idea for decades. It has been rather profitable for universities, researchers and Department of Energy employees for over 70 years. With today's low fossil fuel prices, this is a perfect time for the DOE to change its mindset that more algae research is needed and use some of the existing algae fuel technologies that have been developed with years of taxpayer-paid algae research that is sitting on shelves at NREL and Washington, D.C. After all, the original goal was not to line the file cabinets at the Patent Office and the DoE with patent filings and new (and seemingly useless) technologies, but to help the US "get off of foreign oil" become self-sustainable and energy independent.

The National Algae Association thinks the DOE Algae Biomass Program /BETO needs to be completely restructured. Instead of accomplishing its mission, it changes it! It's not enough to change the upper leadership. It's time to change the staff members who are afraid to shift away from all algae research and who have proven themselves to be incapable of meeting the commercial algae production needs. Someone needs to admit that the Congressional mandate that funds the DOE Algae Biomass Program is outdated and no longer fits the needs for which it was intended. Past algae research grant recipients stated years ago that "all algae technology hurdles had been met. It's all engineering and scale-up going forward." Then what did it do? It applied for and received additional research grants!

It takes less than a year to build a commercial algae farm or indoor algae bio-manufacturing facility using lots of proven existing technologies. So what is the hold up in Washington?

NAA has asked the DOE Algae Biomass Program/BETO, its algae research grant recipients, its lobbyists and the media sources that they pay to report on their 'accomplishments' to be more accountable when discussing the commercial algae production industry. We have asked that they be more accountable to the US taxpayers who are actually paying them and to be less accountable to the universities it has been supporting for almost a century. Algae does not grow in Washington, DC and never will.