

NGOs, scientists hit back at food vs fuel, indirect land use change proponents with hard data



An analysis of corn prices and US land use change in the United States during the active years of the Homestead Act showed no statistical correlation between land use change and corn prices

From Bangkok to Fargo, biofuels scientists have hit back at what they term faulty research and misguided priorities – with a series of presentations on palm oil, indirect land use change, and food vs fuel.

In Thailand, [the private, non-industry related NGO World Growth](#), founded by Australian diplomat Alan Oxley, released a new report exposing what it termed “damaging economic and environmental consequences for developing countries of misguided campaigns by Western “green” groups to halt production of palm oil, the most sustainable vegetable oil available.”

The group said that “Palm oil is a highly sustainable, energy efficient crop, generating nearly 10 times the energy it consumes — compared to a ratio of 2.5 for soybeans and 3 for ripe oilseed. More importantly, its production has been commended by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank as effective in alleviating poverty in the developing world.”

In its report, World Group reminds that the terms of the 1992 Rio Treaty state that global strategies employed to tackle climate change should not undermine the capacity of developing countries to raise living standards. The group criticized efforts by Western environmentalists to pressure cosmetic and food companies to boycott palm oil; lobbying governments to impose trade bans; and pushing measures to limit palm oil production in the new UN climate change treaty.

Meanwhile, [the Nebraska Corn Board noted](#) the state farmers will produce record harvests of 1.55 billion bushels of corn this year at an average of 169 bushels per acre, and said that harvest results this year should finally put to rest the arguments advanced by the Grocery Manufacturers Association that ethanol mandates were the cause of rising food prices.

The Corn Board noted that corn costs have plummeted to under \$3.50 per bushel, down from \$8.00 per bushel in 2008, despite increased ethanol production in the US, but have not resulted in a decrease in food prices. Further, the Board pointed out that the nation as a whole will produce 13

billion bushels of corn this year, equal to the previous record, on 6 million fewer acres than in 2007, and will result in enough ethanol for fuel, feed and food markets, as well as meeting export goals.

Also, [North Dakota biofuels economist Cole Gustafson](#), of the NDSU Extension Service, wrote a stinging article on indirect land use change. In the article, he noted that “research on the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has shown clearly that taking existing food acreage out of production has raised grain prices. If the [Land Use Change theory] holds, these rising prices have led to deforestation in the Amazon and the CRP should have a LUC penalty applied to the program.”

Meanwhile, Bruce Dale, distinguished professor of chemical engineering at Michigan State University, in a presentation at North Dakota State University, plotted a chart of historical soybean prices versus deforestation and found the correlation to be less than 2 percent, which indicates that rising soybean prices have had negligible effects on LUC.

[A similar study by Biofuels Digest](#), which was reviewed within the scientific community, also found no statistical correlation could be established between corn prices and conversion of US prairie to productive farmland during the activity history of the US Homestead Act, 1862-1930.

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