

## Could biodiesel be worse for the environment than diesel?

By [Channtal Fleischfresser](#) for [Smart Planet](#) | October 11, 2011



Could biodiesel be worse for the environment than conventional petroleum-based diesel fuel?

Such were the findings of a coalition of 150 scientists from around the world, who last week said that the production of biofuels created a significant indirect impact on land. The scientists recommended that the European Union take immediate action.

"All the studies of land use change indicate that the emissions related to biofuels expansion are significant and can be quite large," they wrote in a letter to the European Commission.

The European Biodiesel Board dismissed the findings on the same day as unscientific.

"Can an industry like the biodiesel industry — the number one renewable fuel industry in Europe — be at risk of closing its production plants because of something that is not validated?" said European Biodiesel Board Secretary General Raffaello Garofalo.

The scientists' findings were based on a concept known as indirect land use change. As biofuel production expands, so too does the demand for agricultural land. Depending on how that land is acquired — by clearing rain forests or draining peat lands, for instance — the amount of carbon released into the atmosphere can nullify any savings in carbon emissions that might result from using the biodiesel as fuel.

The debate is unlikely to be resolved soon, and any action take by the European Commission could deal a serious blow to the E.U.'s \$17.5 billion biodiesel industry. It could also open the door for other biofuels, such as Brazilian sugar cane ethanol, to expand their presence in European markets.