

MYTHBUSTERS: THE TRUTH ABOUT ETHANOL



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THE TRUTH ABOUT ETHANOL

Ethanol is a fast-changing industry, and a lot of old information - as well as misleading rumors - have been spread over the past few years. Here are the top myths about ethanol, and the facts to set them straight.

MYTH: Ethanol raises the price of food.

FACT: Ethanol has had almost no impact on the price of food at the supermarket. In fact, while corn prices have steadily decreased, food prices have increased and stayed at high levels. Nearly 96 percent of the hike in food prices can be attributed to price speculation, drought and a weak U.S. dollar. Other factors influencing high food prices include costs for labor, transportation, advertising and packaging.

MYTH: Ethanol is made from corn that should be used for food.

FACT: The corn we use to make ethanol isn't the same corn you buy in the grocery store, and isn't typically used in food. It does, however, contain proteins and nutrients that make a valuable feed for livestock, and the process of making ethanol keeps that feed intact. The ethanol industry is now one of the largest providers of this feed, called distillers grains.

MYTH: Ethanol doesn't help the environment.

FACT: From "well to wheel," ethanol from today's modern plants reduces greenhouse gas emissions by up to 59 percent compared to gasoline, according to the latest study. That's taking into account the entire lifecycle of ethanol, from tilling the land to planting the corn, to transportation, and eventually to your gas tank and tailpipe. Future ethanol production methods could reduce greenhouse gas emissions even further - cellulosic ethanol may eventually reduce emissions by 80 percent or more. Today, ethanol is the only renewable fuel that's practical for use in the cars we already have - and it's better than gasoline for both the environment and America.

Source: Yale's Journal of Industrial Ecology

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MYTH: It takes more energy to make ethanol than it provides.

FACT: According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, ethanol now provides 67 percent more energy than it takes to produce, and is improving with new technology.

MYTH: The potential of ethanol is inherently limited by the fact that it can only be made from two or three sources - and technology to move beyond that is still years away.

FACT: The next generation of ethanol is here now. It's made from cellulose, the most common renewable biomass on the planet. It's found in all plants, and today's ethanol producers are making it from corn cobs, wood waste, agricultural waste and more. Other sources all over America are in development, and with continued support, next-generation biofuels could replace much of our imported oil by 2030. The technology of cellulosic ethanol could be used all over the world to help make poor countries and rural communities energy independent, too.

MYTH: Ethanol is bad for my car.

FACT: Over 70 percent of gasoline pumped in America contains ethanol. This means your car is probably already using ethanol, and you may not even have noticed. Virtually all cars made after 1980 could run on higher blends such as E15. Your car may run on even higher blends - check your owner's manual or ask your mechanic. Many automakers now have flex fuel vehicles (FFVs) available in America, which are designed to run on any blend up to E85.

Ethanol is a clean-burning, high-octane fuel that reduces emissions and helps keep your engine clean. It's the only practical, renewable fuel available right now, for the car you already have.

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MYTH: Increasing the amount of corn used for ethanol will lead to deforestation.

FACT: The crops needed for ethanol won't require new land due to increased efficiencies in the field and at the ethanol plant. Corn farmers have consistently increased their crop yields so that today, they grow five times as much corn as they did in the 1930s - on 20 percent less land. Average yield per acre has increased from 24 bushels in 1931 to 163 today and experts expect it to double again in the next 25 years. Mirroring those gains have been improvements in the efficiency of ethanol production which squeezes more and more ethanol out of every bushel. Twenty years ago, ethanol producers averaged around 2.5 gallons of ethanol per bushel and today it's almost 3. Over a recent five-year period, there was a better than six percent gain in ethanol yield, showing that the process continues to get better all the time. All of these improvements indicate that additional land won't be needed for ethanol production and that's why deforestation has dropped by half in the past decade while ethanol production has exploded.

Ethanol is more than a fuel. It's a solution.

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